

When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 415-418

Chapter 415

“Do you want a Dad?” I asked her.

Surprisingly, Summer was more sensible than I expected. She shot back, “What about you?”

I smiled lightly. The darkness slowly descended over the city. On the way home, I gave her a bag of freshly baked chocolate buns.

The buns tasted delicious as we savored them, sitting on a stone bench in the yard.

Sometimes, I would dream of a young Macy running towards me with her arms full of mangoes.

We would slice the mangoes up and mix them with sugar. Our entire afternoon would be dedicated to doing only that.

I started sleeping better after Summer had gotten used to living in R Province. In fact, the sun was usually already high in the sky whenever I woke up.

There was a resort next to the R Province lake that was constructed about half a year ago. After finishing work at the restaurant, I headed over to the hotel to start my janitorial job.

The job was relatively easy. I only took up the job because it was near Summer’s school, so it was convenient for me to drop her off and pick her up.

It was late evening when I finished cleaning the hotel and changed into a set of new clothes, preparing to pick Summer up from school.

“Going to pick your daughter up?” Colin asked, leaning against a door frame.

Colin was the hotel manager—a tall, broad man in his late thirties with a handsome face. I turned to look at him, nodding. “Do you need me to help pick Michael up too?”

He chuckled and shook his head. “I intend to go together with you.”

Colin was the one who interviewed me when I first applied for a job here. Looking confused as he read over my resume, he had asked, “You graduated from a reputable university, so why are you applying to be a janitor?”

“I believe all work is equal.” I shrugged. “Besides, the salary of a janitor isn’t that low.”

He had raised an eyebrow, smiling in amusement. It was true that the rest of the job positions in the hotel had trial periods and promotion periods, with everyone sharing the same low salary in the beginning.

However, the janitor position was different, and it had a fixed, above-average salary.

It might have been fate that brought the two of us together. We eventually became closer after learning that we were both single parents.

Due to his job as a manager, there were times when he couldn’t pick his son up from school and would occasionally ask me to pick his son and Summer up together.

We left the hotel premises in his car. The drive to school took less than ten minutes.

Many parents were waiting outside the kindergarten entrance. There were also several senior citizens in the crowd, sitting in the rest area outside the school.

“We still have five minutes. The sunshine is really bright today, so why don’t you sit down over there for a bit?” Colin pointed to an empty seat under the shadow of a large tree.

I laughed. “I’ll be fine! Five minutes isn’t that long.” Perhaps it was the postpartum side effects, but my body was easily prone to becoming sore and tired in recent years.

He chuckled and decided not to push the topic any further, glancing at his watch. “There’ll be an opening for a position with an attractive salary package. The only downside is that you will have to make business trips. I can talk with the higher-ups and make some arrangements for you if you’re interested.”

“I can’t go on business trips. Summer gets scared when she’s home alone.” I refused, shaking my head.

“I knew you’d say that.” Colin wiped at his forehead and grinned. “There are not many business trips to attend to. Besides, you will receive two paychecks—another one as a receptionist. After all, R Province is a small city. There wouldn’t be many business trips or reception. So, the company believes that they could get one person to take up two roles.”

I blinked owlshly. The offer did sound tempting. “How much is the pay?”

“Eight thousand!” He paused briefly, then said, “You’re a graduate of a well-known university. Being a janitor is a waste of your talents. Plus, living costs are going to increase as Summer grows up, and your current salary isn’t going to cut it.”

He wasn’t wrong. The expenses and cost of buying a house after leaving J City had left me with little savings.

Summer was already five years old, and most kids started developing hobbies and interests at her age. I was considering signing her up for an art class just a few days ago.

I thought the idea over, looking up at Colin. “Are you sure?”

“I promise!” He nodded.

“Then, could you please make the arrangements for me? Thank you!”

“Of course,” he promised. “Just a thank you won’t suffice, though. You’ll have to treat me to dinner someday.”

“No problem!”

The gates to the kindergarten swung open, and the teachers brought students out class by class.

Summer and Michael were in the same class. Bright smiles were plastered on their faces as soon as they spotted us.

“Mommy!” Summer squealed, looking up at her teacher. “Ms. Nikki, Michael’s and my parents are here! We’re leaving now, bye-bye!”

The sentence barely left her mouth before she grabbed ahold of Michael and took off dashing towards us.

Hugging my legs, Summer pleaded cutely, “Mommy, I invited Michael to eat with us today because we both think your cooking is yummy.”

Then she leaned in close to my ear and whispered, “Don’t embarrass me, okay?”

I laughed awkwardly, turning to the young boy. “Would you like to eat at our place tonight, Michael?”

Michael was an introvert. He gripped his father's hand tightly as he stared at Summer and nodded. "Mhm. Thank you, Ms. Stovall!"

"Let's go, then!"

At home, Summer and Michael busied themselves with picking produce in the backyard while Colin left to purchase fish.

Meanwhile, I started washing vegetables in the kitchen.

For the past four years, I had made a habit of personally cooking for Summer so as to ensure she had a balanced diet. As a result, my cooking skills had improved greatly.

After I'd washed the vegetables, the two kids came stumbling into the kitchen, each carrying a small basket.

Michael's basket was filled to the brim—some of the vegetables inside threatening to spill over.

Summer's basket only had several miscellaneous vegetables. It looked like she had been walking behind Michael and carefully picking up anything that had actually fallen out of his basket.

"We're back, Mommy!" Summer proudly held her basket high up in the air, her face streaked with dirt.

I took the basket from Michael, hurriedly wiping away the sweat on his face. "You should share some with Summer next time. It's too heavy for you to carry yourself!"

The boy grinned, his eyes soft and full of affection as he looked at Summer. "She's too small to carry this!"

"That's right, Mommy! I asked Michael to help me carry these because I'm not strong enough!" Summer giggled. I couldn't help but wonder if she had learned this shamelessness from Jackson.

Furrowing my eyebrows, I scolded, "If you bully Michael like this again, I'll make you water all the vegetables in the backyard by yourself."

"I don't care. I won't be by myself, anyway." She pouted.

This little...

Michael had always rushed to help her whenever she was receiving punishment. It would seem that she had gotten used to his company, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Colin came back, having bought some carp fish and shrimp.

Summer picked up one of the shrimp and started chasing poor Michael around with it in the yard.

Taking the basket of produce from me, Colin said, "I'll wash these. The fish have been cleaned, so you can cook them straight away."

I nodded.

Soon, the two kids smelled the food and gathered around the stove, staring up at me as their stomachs grumbled.

"Go and set the table, you little wolves!" Colin ordered them, putting down the clean vegetables next to me.

Just like I'd expected, Michael went off to take out the plates and utensils while Summer didn't budge an inch.

Colin laughed, picking her up in his arms and setting her aside. "Be a good girl and take the fruits by the sink and place them on the dinner table. We'll start eating soon, I promise."

She nodded, whining in my direction, "Hurry up, Mommy! I'm hungry!"

Nodding, I plated up the dishes and Colin served them up.

A giggle escaped me when I spotted the kids were already waiting eagerly in their seats. "You guys go ahead. My vegetable stew's not done yet."

"We'll wait for you, Mommy!" Summer suggested, grinning in anticipation at me even though she was starving.

After dinner, Colin and Michael washed the dishes while Summer and I went to the yard to pick some fruits.

I had scattered lots of watermelon seeds in the garden last spring and bought several peach trees when I first moved to R Province. Now, the yard would bless us with an abundance of fresh fruits every year at the height of summer.

A basket in one arm, Summer picked up some peaches from the ground, asking, "Mommy, do you like Mr. Johnson?"

I cracked up with laughter, pinching her tiny nose. "What are you trying to say, sweetheart?"

She held her chin, deep in thought. "I was thinking if you could make Mr. Johnson my Daddy."

"Do you want a Daddy that badly?" I did a double-take.

Summer tilted her head, scrunching her face up in contemplation before solemnly saying, “Not really. But, I like Michael. If you got married to Mr. Johnson, then I can get married to Michael too.”

“You can still get married to Michael without Mr. Johnson marrying your Mommy!” A deep, loud voice called out from behind us.

The both of us whipped around in surprise. Summer gasped and ran as fast as her short legs could take her. “Mr. Jackson!”

His arms opened wide for Summer to run into them, which she happily did. “If you really want a father, why don’t you call me Daddy, Summer?” he suggested.

She was quiet for a moment before replying, “But my friend said that a Daddy is someone who sleeps on the same bed as Mommy.”

She...

Jackson pursed his lips, glancing over at me. “Your daughter knows too much.”

Guffawing, I held the basket in one arm and a watermelon in another as I walked towards him. “Why are you here? Didn’t you say that you were busy?”

He let go of Summer, taking the basket and watermelon from me. “I figured that the fruits in your garden would be ripe by now, so I plan on staying over for the next few days to eat some. Is that okay?”

“Of course!”

Jackson had opened up a counseling clinic in J City, and things were going swimmingly for him these past few years.

He had come to visit us quite frequently when we first moved to R Province. However, those visits were reduced to only once per year due to how busy he was getting.

The sky was dark after we had fruits for dessert, and Summer insisted on going out to take a walk.

Not having much else to do, everyone subsequently tagged along and headed out.

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Both sides of the street were lined with rose bushes that were always in full bloom during this time of the year. Summer liked playing here, and she liked dragging Colin and Michael along here with her as well.

Every time she came here, she would ask for an ice cream cone, and Colin would buy one for her.

Colin exited a shop, handing one ice cream cone each to Summer and Michael before giving me one as well.

I chuckled. He's treating me like a child.

Summer carefully licked at her cone, lifting her head up to look at Colin. "Mr. Johnson, why do you always buy ice cream for Mommy too? Mommy says that only kids eat ice cream, and adults don't."

"Your Mommy is a kid, just like you," joked Colin.

Summer glanced at Jackson in confusion, going on to ask, “Mr. Jackson is the same age as Mommy, so does that mean he’s a kid? Why didn’t you buy ice cream for Mr. Jackson?”

Jackson nearly spat his water out. “That’s because I’m a manly man. I’m not a kid, so I don’t eat these kinds of things. Your Mommy and I are different—no matter how old your Mommy gets, she will always be a child.”

Summer nodded, although it didn’t look like she understood a single thing he’d said.

As the sky grew darker and darker, the street lamps suddenly lit up. I couldn’t help but gasp at the sight. Nick and I had walked through a street that looked similar to this one in the past.

That street had also been filled with rose bushes, but this one didn’t have a night market, nor a barbecue stand.

“What are you thinking about?” Jackson nudged me, jolting me from my daze.

I realized that Summer and Michael had already run off a good distance away. Colin was following closely behind them.

I shook my head slowly in response to Jackson’s question.

His eyes darted between Colin and me, raising an eyebrow. “He’s quite alright—personality-wise and looks-wise. Other than being a little older, he’d be a good choice.”

His sudden comment took me aback, and I furrowed my eyebrows as I turned to him. “Huh?”

“Trying to find you a good partner!” He shrugged.

“I take it you’re not so busy with work after all,” I teased.

He sighed, saying casually, “I just think he’s a good guy. He treats you well and has been helping to look after Summer these past few years. Besides, you’re thirty years old. Now that you’ve moved on, you should start rebuilding your life and find someone so that you’ll feel less lonely when Summer grows up.”

I rolled my eyes and decided to ignore him, heading towards the kids.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me. I’m being serious!” Jackson chased after me, ranting on, “Ashton is already planning on getting engaged. You should really start to think about your own future as well.”

A chill ran down my spine, and I stiffened for the briefest moment. Taking a few seconds to process the new information, I glanced back at Jackson. “Engaged?”

He nodded. “With Rebecca. She is his responsibility, after all. Even if there’s no love between them, he has to take responsibility for her, so getting married isn’t that big of a deal. You, on the other hand, should honestly consider Colin.”

I sighed, walking away. The night had turned darker than I last remembered.

That’s right.

It’s been four years. Ashton starting to live his own life shouldn’t have come as a surprise.

We were now strangers to each other. I should be wishing him well.

Quietly finishing my ice cream under the dim glow of the street lamps, I suddenly felt like this street resembled my life’s journey.

Summer was sound asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow at home. Colin had brought Michael home as well, and Jackson stayed up chatting with me for a while longer before retreating to his guest room.

In my bedroom, I hugged my hurting stomach for a long time, unable to move from the pain. Even after four years, I would still suffer from horrible cramps every time I got my period.

And to top it all off, I had also eaten ice cream today.

I'd thought that I could sleep off the pain, just like I used to, but I didn't expect to lose consciousness in the middle of the night.

When I came to, I was at the hospital. Jackson's arms were crossed as he glared at me. "Don't tell me you didn't know you're not supposed to eat ice cream while on your period."

I sighed weakly, licking my dry lips. "It doesn't hurt anymore."

He huffed, his eyes slightly swollen and red. "Summer was so scared that she burst into tears and refused to leave your side. I was in the next room. You could have called me or shouted out. Why did you endure the pain by yourself? Since when you started not telling others whenever you're hurting?"

He has a point.

Since when had I started to keep all my pain to myself?

"I'm fine. Don't worry about me," I chuckled lightly, shaking my head.

Sensing that I wasn't taking any of his words to heart, Jackson stormed out of the hospital ward, clearly pissed off.

Colin helped me with some of the hospitalization procedures, looking apologetic as he turned to me. "I'm really sorry. I should have noticed sooner!"

"I was craving a sweet treat, so it wasn't your fault," I reassured him. "Has Michael already gone off to school?"

“Yes, and so has Summer. Though, she’s still very worried about you. I’ll make a trip to the school later and tell her that you’re doing better.”

“Thank you.” Summer and I were co-dependent on each other. I couldn’t leave her, and she couldn’t leave me.

“You’re welcome.” He smiled like he wasn’t sure what to do with me. “You need to rest here for two days while I handle things at the hotel. You can pause your janitorial job for a while and focus on your new job. Hopefully, that’ll take some of the burdens off of your shoulders.”

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Afraid that Colin would think I was a broken record if I thanked him again, I just laughed self-consciously. “I’ll leave that to you.”

He set the hospitalization form down on the bedside table, sighing. “You shouldn’t try to shoulder everything yourself.”

I pursed my lips.

As it turned out, I was not in a serious condition. Jackson stayed accompanying me. There was someone to take care of Summer, and Colin would visit me sometimes.

I had been busy with work and taking care of Summer every day for the past four years. It felt strange to have a few days of free time with nothing to handle or manage.

Jackson looked at me as we were packing my things before getting discharged from the hospital. “The doctor says that you developed this illness as a result of giving birth. You better take good care of yourself from now on. You’re only thirty years old, so don’t end up looking like a hag by the time you turn forty.”

I hummed, changing the topic. “Summer wants to eat fried chicken. Let’s drop by the supermarket on the way home.”

He rolled his eyes and shrugged. “Of course. That’s your top priority.”

I picked up my stuff and headed downstairs without another word.

Colin had kindly offered to drive us and was already waiting for us in the parking lot. I didn’t have a good reason to refuse him, so I got in his car.

After buying chicken at the supermarket and sending Jackson and me home, he went back out to pick Summer and Michael up from school.

My days returned to their ordinary, mundane routine. I recalled how I used to dream about if, by some miracle, I could spend the rest of my life with Ashton.

Perhaps I was a more family-focused person. My ideal life was to take care of my children, learn new recipes, and make sure that my children and husband were healthy and happy.

But life doesn’t always work out the way you want it to. I had let go of many things in the past four years. Yet, I always found myself thinking that maybe Ashton had his own grievances. Maybe he had his reasons for lying to me and hurting me.

Because I loved him too much, my hatred and anger towards him were poisoned with love. As time passed, those opposing emotions canceled each other out and dissolved into nothing. No matter what happened, we were now two separate people leading two separate lives.

Colin worked efficiently to secure me a spot in the office, but it was hard for me to get used to having a job that gave me so much free time.

As a result of that free time, I distracted myself by listening to some gossip and rumors that were going around the office. Apparently, someone in the hotel had committed suicide by jumping off a building because they were facing relationship troubles.

Some people in the office debated over the issue.

“I heard that the girl’s parents are ministers from K City. I know that our hotel had no part in her death, but it still happened on our hotel grounds. I have a bad feeling about this.”

“I know, right? We had put so much effort into helping the hotel recover, but now, it looks like we’ll have to look for new jobs again.”

“Ugh. I also heard that our parent company is super well-off and doesn’t care about the profits our small hotel is making. Those snobbish higher-ups probably don’t want to waste money on handling the situation. In fact, they might just shut down the hotel.”

“That means, we’re going to become unemployed... To think that I went through so much trouble to work here—where the pay is actually good and the environment is alright. I can’t believe I’m losing my job because of this.”

Some of the hotel receptionists stood near me and chatted as I subtly listened in on their conversation. They did have a point. R Province was a small city without any large corporations. Instead, it only had some factories and smaller companies.

This holiday hotel was already considered large compared to the other hotels in the city, with a better salary and working environment. If it shut down, I would have to look for a new job all over again.

It would be hard to find a job that paid even three thousand monthly. I couldn’t help but sigh internally. It was just my luck that this would happen right before I was about to get this month’s paycheck.

Colin walked in, furrowing his eyebrows as his stare swept over the gaggle of receptionists. "If you have time to stand around moping, I'd rather you use that time to think about the work you have done."

The young women jumped, instantly scattering.

Colin headed towards me, noticing that I was staring blankly at my computer screen. "What are you doing? It's nearly time to get off of work. Do you want to go pick up Summer and Michael together?"

I nodded on reflex before remembering the work I still had left. I frantically shook my head. "Please help me pick Summer up. I haven't finished my tasks yet."

Glancing at my computer screen that displayed an incomplete table, he laughed and walked away without another word.

The group of receptionists from before started whispering among themselves as soon as he stepped out the door, turning their focus to me.

Joyce stared me down with disdain. "Hey, Scarlett. How did you turn from a janitor into one of the most laidback workers at this hotel in charge of two positions overnight? What's your secret?"

Her tone sounded weirdly sharp and icy as she spoke. Someone else, adding fuel to the fire, chimed in, "Tell us, Scarlett. You seem so much prettier and wiser with experience compared to us. I'm sure you know some tips for sweet-talking people."

Joyce scoffed, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Sweet-talk? More like sleeping around! I heard that women turn into hungry cougars when they become thirty years old, and it looks like Mr. Johnson couldn't escape this old witch's clutches either! Her method of using sex to benefit herself is much more convenient compared to our way of working hard day by day to get to where we are now!"

I looked up at them as they continuously spat out terms like "old witch" and "sleeping around."

