

When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 419-422

Chapter 419

Immense envy for youth surged through me. The leniency that came with being a juvenile meant Joyce could speak without reservation and lash out at people as she pleased.

My gaze settled on the glass of water on the table. I stood up and approached her. There was no anger in my voice, but a cold indifference seeped through my words. "Indeed, I'm thirty now. That's four to five years older than you. I wonder what I was up to when I was your age."

Quirking an eyebrow, I continued, "I was a newlywed at that time, and my career had just taken off. The work culture back then was a lot more complicated than what you're experiencing now. I, too, had my fair share of interactions with some older girls at my workplace. They were all my superiors, but I focused on working hard to reach their status instead of sabotaging them."

"Witnessing your insolent behavior gave me an epiphany—that good upbringing is crucial. My parents taught me to look up to those who are better than me and follow in their footsteps, not defame them. Ms. Newton, your upbringing sure is... Disappointing."

Objectively, these were not harsh words, but it was a different story altogether since I involved her family and character.

Joyce was still young and easily incensed. Fuming, she raised a hand to slap me.

I was not a naive lady in her twenties. In one swift motion, I intercepted her swinging arm, picked up the glass of water, and mercilessly threw the water in her face.

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“Ms. Newton, you’ll get your tongue severed if you don’t watch it well. Remember to choose your words wisely the next time you decide to run your mouth.” I was in no mood to finish the forms and promptly left the office.

An enraged shriek pierced the air. “Scarlett, you vile woman! Just you wait and see!”

I could hear her having a mental breakdown behind me, but I paid her no heed and returned home.

Colin had brought Summer back. The young girl had been acting as my shadow lately, trailing behind me wherever I went. Perhaps my bout of illness had worried her, so she took to following me around for fear that something would happen to me.

Halfway through our meal, Colin suddenly looked at me and said, “A developer from K City will be checking in at the hotel tomorrow. You may need to entertain him on my behalf and plan an itinerary for his stay at R Province, which will last for a few days. The higher-ups decided that it would be best for him to take over the hotel after the incident.”

I paused momentarily before voicing my confusion. “Why is a developer taking over a hotel business?”

Colin smiled wryly. “The land around the hotel is undeveloped. As you rightly suspected, these developers have no interest in the hotel itself. Instead, they have plans to start up new projects near the hotel. R Province has been doing well in the past two years. Paired with the fact that we have beautiful scenery and a good number of foreign visitors, it would only take a couple of years to develop R Province into a tourist destination.”

His reasoning made sense. R Province was not huge, but it had picturesque scenery. Every year during spring, the daffodils surrounding the city would be in full bloom, making it appear as if the nondescript city were floating on a sea of yellow.

There were also numerous natural waterfalls and minorities living at the edge of the province. Recent trends showed that more and more people from busy, bumbling cities wished to live in a tranquil environment after retirement. R Province, with its peaceful surroundings, would be an ideal spot.

“What time will he arrive?” I inquired as I piled Summer and Michael’s plates with vegetables. The two children had identical preferences for food—both being meat-eaters with a strong aversion to greens. Their picky appetite warranted force-feeding to ensure that they get their nutrients.

Colin finished his food and set his utensils down. “Around noon. Make sure to dress professionally.”

I nodded in understanding. While I had never been a hostess, I had been on the receiving end a few times before, back when I held a high position in Fuller Corporation.

I had a good idea of how things worked.

The following day, I donned the clothes I brought with me from J City. I intentionally selected the outfit with hopes that I would appear presentable when I greeted the esteemed visitor. I barely bought any clothes in the last few years I lived in R province, and on the off chance that I did, the clothes were cheap items from night markets. It had been long since I last wore branded clothing, let alone customized outfits.

The outfit I had on was a customized piece by a renowned Italian designer, courtesy of Ashton. A plethora of similar clothing hung in my wardrobe. Back then, I was carrying Summer and had thrown on this formal attire for convenience when I left.

After arriving at R Province, the outfit had been shoved in a box, never to see the light for years. The attire that was worth tens of thousands now smelled vaguely of mold, but its exceptional workmanship shone through. Even years of neglect could not dim its excellent quality.

I stood waiting at the entrance of the hotel.

Coincidentally, Joyce was the receptionist on duty for today. When she glimpsed my luxurious attire, she could not help but make a sarcastic remark.

“Is seducing the manager not enough? Are you targeting the developer now? You’re a mere sparrow hoping to be a phoenix. Do you have no shame at all?”

Taking into account that we were in public, I refrained from commenting and gave Joyce the side-eye.

Our relationship had grown tense after the dispute the day before.

It was known to all that she had a beef with me.

A black Mercedes-Benz pulled up at the entrance. It might very well be the best vehicle in R Province.

Upon noticing the developer’s arrival, Joyce averted her eyes and plastered a cordial smile on her face as she took her post near the door.

The hotel staff gathered at the entrance and stood in a line to welcome the distinguished guest.

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I walked toward the car and bent down to open the door.

However, I was interrupted before my hand made contact with the cool metal.

“Please, allow me!”

The man’s low, clear voice was familiar to me.

I reflexively lifted my eyes. A wave of astonishment washed over me as recognition clicked in my head. I realized in a split second that the developer in question was none other than Ashton.

Joseph appeared to be taken aback too. He flinched when he met my gaze before withdrawing his hand. He backed away and gestured toward the car. "Please."

I went rigid. It would be a lie to say that I was unruffled, but the shock only lasted for a brief moment.

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I quickly regained my composure and opened the car door with deference.

A pair of polished leather shoes appeared, followed by the man's slender physique. He stood tall, his gaze shrewd but indifferent.

He glared frostily at Joseph, his imposing voice brimming with displeasure as he spoke, "Joseph, you..." He faltered midsentence. His hands, which were straightening his suit moments ago, froze in midair as if someone had cast a spell on him.

His sudden silence garnered the attention of everyone present, and they peered over with curiosity.

I frowned, loathing the unsolicited spotlight.

It took a while for him to collect himself. The hotel staff began to fidget uneasily, suspecting that they had butchered the welcome somehow.

Joseph knew him best. When he noticed the depth of Ashton's gaze on me, he cleared his throat and broke the awkward silence. "Mr. Fuller, let's head into the hotel to get some rest!"

Perhaps it was a hallucination, but I could sense his body quivering ever so slightly—whether it was due to excitement or ire would be a mystery.

After a long standstill, he tore his eyes away from me and wordlessly entered the hotel, escorted by a swarm of people.

He exuded a unique aura that made him stand out no matter where he went.

I watched his broad back and sighed. This is a reunion of sorts, but we are nothing more than strangers. The bitter irony was not lost on me.

The throng of people that surrounded him was so thick that I barely managed to squeeze past them to press the elevator button—a feat that would have been impossible had it not been my status as the hostess.

I was not paying attention to where I was going and tripped on someone's feet. I lost my balance and fell face-forward to the ground.

My knees hit the ground with a thud, and the pain shot up my thighs, spreading through my whole body. A hiss of agony escaped my lips.

In any other situation, my embarrassing predicament would have blown over quickly. After all, it was understandable that one would fall over in such a hectic environment.

However, I never expected Ashton to stop in his tracks and approach me. He pulled me to my feet without hesitation.

Time had been good to him. He had grown even more handsome in the past four years. "Are you hurt?"

I shook my head and found my footing. Retracting my hand from his grip, I gave him a faint smile. "I'm fine!"

Faking a tough exterior, I endured the pain in silence as I staggered to the elevator.

Colin introduced me to Ashton once we stepped into the elevator. "Mr. Fuller, this is Ms. Stovall, otherwise known as Scarlett. She is in charge of reception at the hotel and will be arranging your itinerary for the next few days. Please feel free to approach her if you have any inquiries."

Ashton's eyes riveted on me as he replied impassively, "Alright."

I would have believed his calm facade had I not noticed the tremble in his hand, which was shoved in his pocket. The movement was so imperceptible that it almost escaped my notice, but it was hard to miss when I had my head down the whole time.

Colin swiped the key card to the room and left to attend to other matters. Joseph looked at me and spluttered, "Mrs. Fu— Ms. Stovall, you can go over Mr. Fuller's schedule with him. I have some tasks to do!"

I pursed my lips. Under normal circumstances, shouldn't I be arranging Ashton's schedule with Joseph? So why am I going over it with Ashton himself?

Joseph scuttled away, leaving the two of us in the room. Ashton reclined on the sofa, looking weary and worn out.

Work was work, and I had my responsibility to fulfill. The silence stretched on, but Ashton seemed reluctant to talk. I figured he was tired and did not want to discuss work at the moment.

"Mr. Fuller, you must have had a long day. Why don't you rest for now? I can go over your schedule with your assistant later," I suggested.

After saying my piece, I turned to leave.

His sonorous voice sounded behind me. “We’ve already met, so why are you still trying to avoid me?”

Stunned by his candor, I came to a halt. I turned to look at him and replied serenely, “You’re reading too much into it, Mr. Fuller. You’re our guest, so it is customary to let you get some rest before discussing work.”

His obsidian eyes bore into me, complex emotions lurking in the depths. Curving my lips in a smile, I continued, “Please rest well, Mr. Fuller. Should you have any problems, feel free to approach me during my working hours.”

With that, I left the room. I was not escaping him, truly.

I knew since the day I left J City that our paths would cross sooner or later. I had accepted the inevitable and braced myself for this day.

Everyone carried their own baggage. There was no reason why I should be weighed down by mine.

My knees were throbbing in pain when I got back to my office. I pulled up the hem of my slacks to reveal a huge bruise that looked rather swollen.

“It’s such a rarity to see you so elegant and poised, and yet you’ve injured yourself. Don’t wear heels in the future,” Colin chastised as he entered the office, not bothering to conceal his concern for me.

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The rest of the staff filed into the office. They caught sight of Colin passing an ointment to me but ignored us promptly.

Since it wasn’t a serious injury, I shooed Colin away. “I’m fine. Go and do your work!”

Thinning his lips, he glanced at me, then at the female employees who were staring in our direction before complying.

Just then, Joyce returned to the office as her shift had ended. When she noticed the medical plaster on my knee, she mocked, “The sight of a wealthy and influential person must have weakened the knees of an uneducated peasant like you. Such a disgrace!”

I pressed my lips together but did not retaliate. Although I was in a rush just now, I knew the true reason I had tripped.

I knew everyone working in the hotel, and there had only been a few people around me at that time. It made sense that Joyce, who had been standing closest to me, was the culprit behind my injury.

After tending to my bruised knee, I walked to the water dispenser and filled a cup with boiling water.

I neared Joyce and asked coolly, “Your face or hand — what’s your choice?”

Her face turned a ghastly white when she noticed the hot water in the cup. “Scarlett, what are you trying to do? I’m warning you. My father is the county mayor of R Province. If you dare lay a finger on me, I’ll make sure you regret it for the rest of your life.”

I nodded nonchalantly, unfazed by her threats. “I suppose I’ll just wait and see!”

Before she could react, I seized her arm and poured scalding water on her porcelain skin. She screamed in agony, but I kept my grip on her and emptied the cup.

As she thrashed around in pain, I said emotionlessly, "Ms. Newton, please plan your schemes better next time. I will let you off easy this time, but I fear your pretty face will have to bear the consequences if this happens again."

"You—"

I cut her off as a thought struck me. "By the way, since you claim that your father is such an important official, it might be good for him to retire now. After all, R Province never flourished under his management despite its advantageous environment. Our economy has been stagnant for the entire time he was in office. It's about time he stepped down."

With those parting words, I took the ointment and left the office.

By the time I reached the ground floor, Colin had pulled up at the entrance. "Get in!" he beckoned.

I raised an eyebrow and was prepared to reject his offer when I remembered my limping gait. Resigned, I slid into the car and put on my seatbelt.

His gaze swept over me. "I'll drop by the pharmacy to buy medicine before sending you home," he announced.

I looked down at my ankle, which had almost doubled in size by now, and did not protest.

"You and Ashton know each other?" Colin blurted after we had long since left the hotel.

I froze before chuckling humorlessly. "Do I look like someone who has connections with the filthy rich?"

He pursed his lips and contemplated solemnly. "Yes!" There was a lapse before he continued, "He was staring at you the whole time just now. It looks like things are complicated between you two."

Smiling, I didn't admit nor deny his speculation.

By the time I reached home, I had given up battling my swollen ankle and slumped unceremoniously in a rattan chair.

Unexpectedly, I fell into a slumber, only to be awoken by a loud knock on the door.

Streaks of tears wetted my face.

It had been a long time since I last cried or dreamt of that child. He had grown up well. He looked healthy and was heavier than I remember.

The incessant knocks on the door urged me to hurry up. I wiped away my tears and splashed some water on my face to wake myself up.

I swung the door open.

To my surprise, Ashton appeared in my line of sight. Backlit by the sun, a golden halo surrounded his lean frame. His expression was somber, and his dark eyes were deep as ever. His Adam's apple bobbed when he saw me, giving away the churning emotions within him.

A large hand grasped mine before I could utter a word. "I can't do it. I can't act like I don't know you. I've tried to let you go for the last four years, but you're stuck in my head. I can't forget you," he admitted.

He has changed!

He's not the same anymore. The Ashton I knew would never say anything so corny.

I sighed softly and withdrew my hand. "Mr. Fuller, please come in for a seat," I offered, my tone courteous but distant.

I suppose I wasn't too astounded. This encounter was not filled with heartache and yearning as I had imagined. Four years was enough to heal a lot of wounds.

Even my resentment for him had faded into nothing.

He stepped into the yard and sat on the rattan chair. I offered some fruit I had picked the day before as I would any guest. A smile stretched across my face, but my tone was detached. "This is home-grown. The texture is lovely if I do say so myself. Please have a taste."

He stared at me, his gaze deep and unwavering. After a long moment, he nodded and took a small bite of the peach.

He savored the fruit before looking at me. "It's sweet," was his earnest compliment.

I nodded in response. Four years had stolen my love for chatter.

At that moment, Colin came home with Summer and Michael. He faltered when he saw the man in our yard. However, as a man of culture, he quickly composed himself and bowed his head in greeting. "Good evening, Mr. Fuller!"

Realizing that Ashton had no recollection of Colin, I interjected, "He's the hotel manager."

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My prompt registered immediately. Ashton stood up and proffered a hand, suave and refined. However, his gaze lingered on Summer and Michael when he noticed them.

Michael seemed to be a late bloomer, at least in comparison to Summer. Both of them were five years old, but Michael appeared a year younger.

Ashton's expression darkened, but I waved it off. "What would you like to eat?" I directed my question to the children.

Summer seemed to be in a foul mood. While her eyes were still on Ashton, she replied, "Anything you make is fine, Mommy."

Michael caught sight of my injured ankle and suggested, "Let Daddy cook for us tonight."

This was nothing out of the norm, but Michael's words were piercing to Ashton's ears.

I offered no clarification. Instead, I looked at Colin and teased lightly, "Looks like it's your turn to show off your cooking skills tonight."

Colin could be rather tactless at times, and his ability to read the room was failing him at the moment. Though he was taken aback by Ashton's presence, he invited graciously, "Mr. Fuller, please stay for dinner with us. We cook with homegrown produce. You should try some."

Ashton masked his emotions and nodded, his eyes dark and unfathomable.

I glanced at the children and instructed them as usual, "Both of you pick some vegetables from the back garden. Summer, don't bully Michael, understand?"

Summer pouted but nodded obediently. "You're so unfair, Mommy. You always help Michael."

Amused by her childish accusation, I explained, "Michael is already shorter than you. If you continue to bully him, he'll never grow taller!"

“Okay, okay, I won’t bully him!” Summer picked up both baskets and told Michael indignantly, “Mommy says that I can’t bully you, so I’ll help you carry your basket, okay?”

Michael, the small gentleman he was, corrected Summer, “Daddy says that I’m a strong man, and strong men should protect girls. You’re not bullying me. I’m protecting you!”

The two children walked toward the back garden, bickering all the way.

I shook my head in resignation, but my lips curled upwards involuntarily. I had always worried that Summer would feel lonely, but seeing how Summer and Michael were closer than biological siblings put me at ease.

As I retracted my gaze, I felt someone’s eyes on me, snapping me back to reality. I turned to find Ashton burning holes in me with his scorching stare. A myriad of emotions flashed in his dark eyes.

Stunned by the intensity of his gaze, I blurted, “Please make yourself at home while I check if my help is needed in the kitchen.”

Long fingers wrapped around my wrist, pulling me back. His voice seemed to rumble in his chest as he asked, “Have you been well all these years?”

My heart skipped a beat at the simple question. I met his gaze and replied with conviction, “I’ve been good. These four years have been the most peaceful years of my life.”

Pain flickered in his eyes as he chuckled ruefully. “Yeah, you do look happy.”

I nodded slightly. “Make yourself at home while I help out in the kitchen,” I repeated as the conversation ran dry.

“Can we be friends?” Ashton asked timidly, his voice helpless and distant. “I’ve tried numerous ways to numb out in the past four years, but my mind has been cruel to me. The more I try to forget, the clearer the memories become. It’s all engraved in my brain. It’s impossible to erase.”

I heaved a sigh, wishing I had the right words to console him. I turned to look Ashton in the eye. "Mr. Fuller, you'll have to move on someday. I'm doing great here. Staying by your side only filled me with hate and resentment. It would break me. Perhaps it might have seemed like I had plenty of friends and family in J City and K City, but I was dying inside. There's no way I can come to terms with my suffering. R Province is my home. Here, I can be the person I aspire to be. I hope you understand my choice, Mr. Fuller."

Ashton held my gaze. His eyes were gentle yet pained, reflecting the conflicting emotions within. A loud silence fell upon us. Seconds ticked by before he finally spoke. "Fine!" The weight of a single syllable pressed down on both of us.

He left soon afterward. I exhaled heavily as I watched his retreating back. Everyone's biggest enemy is themselves.

I entered the kitchen to find Colin preparing the ingredients. He stilled when he saw me. "I can handle this myself. Go and keep Mr. Fuller company."

"I can wash the vegetables," I insisted.

He quickly declined when he glimpsed my ankle. "It looks swollen again. Go and rest!"

Colin could be stubborn at times. Realizing that I wasn't going to change his mind, I surrendered and returned to the yard where I found Joseph waiting for me, expressionless as always. His back was stiff, and his eyes followed me as I approached him.

"Mr. Campbell, is there something I can help you with?"

He handed me a plastic bag and explained, "Mr. Fuller told me to pass this to you. It's medicine for your injury."

"Please relay my thanks!" I accepted the plastic bag with a nod.

Joseph mirrored my action. He thinned his lips before divulging, “Mrs. Fuller, Mr. Fuller has been waiting for you. He knows well that he could have easily found you in the past four years if he wished to, but he’s afraid. He’s afraid that you still hate him and that you would push him away. So he’s been patiently waiting—waiting for you to let go of the pain... Waiting for you to come home.”

A faint smile played on my lips. Though heartfelt, Joseph’s words did little to sway me. “Help me thank Mr. Fuller,” I responded. “Please tell him that each person has their own path to take. There’s no need to stay entangled in the past.”

Joseph opened his mouth to reply but stopped when he heard the finality in my words. He sighed, perhaps in disappointment, and left.

The next day, my ankle had healed significantly. After dropping Summer off, I headed to the hotel.

At the entrance, I ran into Joyce, who was flanked by two burly men.

