

When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 427-431

Chapter 427

He opened his bleary eyes slowly and fixated his gaze on me. Elegantly, he asked, "Are you mad?"

I shook my head without much emotion. "Not really. Drink some water and rest well."

I can't bring myself to be a stranger, albeit not having anymore feelings toward him. After all, we were once lovers.

I walked out of the room and went to bed in another one.

As the gentle morning sun gained ascendancy, its soft rays enveloped the entire R Province and flooded in between the dense fog engulfing the city.

If one climbed up the mountain at dawn, one could catch a glimpse of a mesmerizing view straight out of dreamland.

I woke up early because Summer had to attend school. Standing before the bathroom mirror, I observed the reflection of my barefaced. Since when did the grievances on my face disappear?

Maybe it was when I left everything behind, and came to R Province. Indeed, this is my healing place.

Ashton had already woken up. He seemed to be in deep thoughts standing under the almond tree.

I took a peek, but did not disturb him.

He turned back and called out to me, "You're up."

I nodded. "What would you like to have?"

"Anything."

Without saying much, I felt like I was becoming more and more even-tempered as the days went by.

Summer was surprised to see Ashton. She asked innocently, "Mr. Fuller, why are you here at my house?"

Kids would always say the darndest thing.

Ashton curled his lips. "I don't have a home to go to."

His unintentional reply was rather intriguing as if he wanted me to read between the lines. Lowering my eyes, I did not take it seriously. As years go by, my heart is like a bleak pool of dead water where no breeze can raise a ripple.

On the other hand, Summer was very chatty and continuously asked Ashton many weird questions.

He answered all of them patiently.

Then he looked at me and uttered, "The matters at the hotel are almost done. I'll be going back to K City for a few days."

I nodded and did not continue the conversation.

He stared at me deeply and said, "Take care."

Joseph drove him off. When he left, he said nothing else besides reminding me to take care of myself.

I sent him off with a calm heart. Just like that, he came and gone.

The presence of Louis was a like breath of fresh air to the province. Finally, Stanley was removed from his position.

People at the hotel more or less knew about my relationship with Joyce.

When I was in the bathroom, Jackson sent me a text message, saying that he had returned to J City and would visit in the next few days.

I gave him a short reply.

When I was about to get out of the cubicle, I heard someone gossiping.

"Have you heard? Joyce's father got into trouble. Not only was he sacked, he's also been arrested. Rumor has it that the procuratorate has seized an exorbitant amount of money from his house."

"I'm sure they did. He's been involved in acts of corruption for years and eventually receiving the punishment that he deserves. Remember how disdainful was Joyce? Look at her now! How shameful."

"I heard that this has got something to do with Scarlett? How did the old witch in her thirties do it?"

"She's probably a sugar baby!"

“I doubt it. I heard that she’s the daughter of Louis Stovall. That’s why...”

I decided to get out of the cubicle. They were startled when I opened the door and immediately, the tittle-tattles stopped.

Not knowing how to wriggle their way out of the quagmire, everyone looked at me and blurted the most awkward greeting, “Oh, you’re here, Ms. Stovall.”

I nodded, washed my hands, and left in a flash.

In life, one may get very affected by gossips, especially during the younger days. In retrospect, it boils down to how capable a person is.

Rumors shouldn’t make a person with strong abilities feel insecure because trivial talks don’t matter, what more when spoken by insignificant people.

As long as it’s innocuous, don’t mind it. Who hasn’t been talked about or passed on an unsubstantiated hearsay within a lifetime?

When I got back to my office, Louis called to inform that he wanted to visit the city. Everything in the R Province was almost settled.

The deputy county mayor had been maintaining law and order for a few days. Everything would resume to its normal operations when the new county mayor arrived.

Since he was my relative, I sent him off. There was no airport in R Province, so they had to take a drive to the city.

We exchanged pleasantries before bidding goodbye.

Everything happened expeditiously and seemed to return to a normalcy. I felt so surreal as if everyone had never appeared before.

It was the summer festival.

Though R Province was small, it was a vibrant place. I was on leave, so Colin suggested visiting a famous temple on the outskirts of town. There was a nice hiking trail where the kids could have some good fun and enjoy what nature offered.

The Lotus Temple was situated at a mountaintop in the province. Since many flooded the city center for more festive gaieties, there was only a small crowd worshipping at the temple.

It was nice to start the journey early in the morning when the children were so energetic and did not need any assistance throughout. We laughed and chatted all the way until we reached our destination.

The statue of the deity was enormous. Colin helped Summer to light the candles that she had obtained from the counter. The small-framed body then prayed sincerely.

“Look at how solemn she is. Doesn’t look like a child at all!” Colin whispered and sighed, “She’s too mature for her age.”

I pressed my lips into a straight line and stared at the bronze statue blankly. Thirty years of my life have passed me by and I’ve experienced quite a bit of the cycle from birth, old age, sickness, and even death. I’ve even lost a few closed ones along the journey.

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Seems like I haven’t lost much.

“People say that wishes made at the Lotus Temple will come true. Do you want to try?”

Arching his brows, Colin handed me some candles.

I did not take it. "I don't have any special wish to make besides hoping that the living is well whereas the dead rests in peace. Everything is fated and pre-destined."

Summer came running towards me. "Mommy, do you have anyone you long to meet? You can ask for your wish to be granted in your dreams."

I chuckled and took the lit candle from her hand to place it on the incense burner. "I don't need to ask for that, Summer. I can see whoever I want to see in my dreams, always."

Tilting her head, Summer did not quite understand what I said. She gazed at Colin. "Mr. Johnson, what about you? Have you made a wish?"

"My wish is for you and Michael to grow up happily." Colin grinned with a candle in his hands.

Right when we were leaving, sullen dark clouds gathered along the horizon while cold wind blew in our direction.

Colin offered me his jacket. "Your body is weak, don't catch a cold."

I declined with a polite smile.

He frowned and then covered me with his jacket nonetheless.

Grabbing Michael by the arm, Summer asked softly, "Michael, does your father not like me?"

A boy of few words, he lifted his head to look at Colin and then shrugged. "I don't know."

A child would never beat around the bush.

It brought a smile to Colin's face. He did not clarify.

I took a quick glance at the jacket on my shoulders. My heart did not skip a beat. It's just a regular care and concern gesture from a close friend. Nothing more than that.

We had something to eat before the children dozed off. Colin drove us back under the grey, inclement sky.

When he pulled over at the yard, he wanted to get down and carry Summer into the house.

I interrupted his action. "I'll do it. It's late, you should get going with Michael."

He was slightly taken aback before regaining his senses and obliged. Although he was already in his forties, Colin still carried himself like a young man in his twenties.

Declining him politely and respectfully served as the best form of reply to his genuine heart.

Romance in the twenties was passionate and romantic. However, for the middle-aged, it was nothing more than predictable daily meals and a gentle nod or a polite smile.

With Summer in my arms, I sent him off. Suddenly, my phone rang. It was Ashton. I shifted her to the other hand before answering his call.

"Is it too abrupt for me to show up now?" a low, sexy voice asked.

Subconsciously, I scanned the yard and found a familiar silhouette under the dim street lamp. He was in his regular, elegant suit.

His Mercedes-Benz was parked beside him. I could sense a pair of eyes staring at me, reserved yet intense.

It's been four long years. He's become even more impressive and dependable, exuding an effortless charm, and is still as attractive as ever.

"I need you to help me carry Summer," I said over the phone. With the keys in my bag, a child falling asleep in one arm, and holding a phone on the other, I could not reach for the keys.

I could hear him chuckle before hanging up. As he approached nearer, I noticed a bouquet of pretty flowers in his hands.

He took over Summer single-handedly while handing the bouquet to me. Grinning from ear to ear, he greeted, "Happy summer festival."

Admiring the flowers, I smiled bashfully. I knew he would be back, but I didn't expect it to be so soon.

Perhaps having a joyful heart is better than falling in love.

I fished for the keys and opened the door. The moon was like a pearl adorning the dark blue night sky.

I directed him to Summer's room. When he came out, his shirt was wrinkled. Yet, he still looked dapper in it.

"Do you mind if I stayed the night?" he asked with a smirk.

I looked down. Saying nothing, I searched for the needed amenities and handed it over to him. He accepted it and then habitually made his way to the guest room.

Joseph did not seem to follow him here. It's not hard to guess that he's not here on a business trip; he came because of me.

I tried not to overthink things. He remained a gentleman throughout his stay at my place.

Somehow, his presence deterred Colin's frequent visits to the house.

He had been dropping Summer off at school and picking her up at the end of the day. In addition, he also started joining me in meal preparations. He would even do the laundry!

Life went on peacefully along with other daily activities. We had a ton of fruits picked from the yard, so I brought some with me to the hotel.

Joyce was still working at the hotel. The only difference was her attitude. She no longer put up an arrogant front. In fact, she was mostly quiet when we met.

I guess that's a good thing. Being a civilized acquaintance with no common topic is better than being a hypocrite with an ulterior motive.

During lunch, she took the initiative to ask me out, but I turned her down. "I'm going home to eat."

She did not look offended. "You don't have to avoid me. My father is in jail and I'm no longer a threat to you. I know I used to be very snobbish and stepped on the toes of many. That's why everyone loathes me. However, live and let live. This is my workplace. I don't want to strain the relationship even further and make it difficult or awkward for everybody."

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"We just need to be seen sitting down and having a meal together. I'm not asking for us to shake hands and make up. It's just an act."

I pursed my lips and smiled. "You're very straightforward."

She shrugged. "Well, there's nothing else I can do at this point besides compromising."

"Sure!" I agreed, thinking that it was just a simple gesture.

There were not a lot of good choices when dining out in R Province. Joyce found a restaurant with comparatively good atmosphere and placed orders for food.

She looked at me sharply. "Since you're Louis' daughter, why don't you date Ashton openly?"

Her sudden question dumbfounded me. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you know that the fiancée and wife of the president of Fuller Corporation have always been the talk of the town? It's a major focus in K City." She looked at me in disbelief.

I sipped my drink. "Whatever is the status of our relationship, it's got nothing to do with an outsider like you."

She made a face. "It's fine if you aren't willing to tell me. I just feel that it's such a shame to be in a secret relationship with someone and not publicly acknowledge it. It's embarrassing. It can also hurt the reputation of a dignified lady like you."

Wow. I didn't like that comment.

My frown deepened. "Go ahead and read the tabloids if you like to be entertained by gossips and scandals."

Having lost my appetite to eat, I rose to my feet and left right away.

She came running after me and snapped in an unfriendly tone, "You're jealous of how Ashton keeps on protecting Rebecca. You also hate the fact that Nancy is the one who accompanies him to all kinds of events. Just because you can't win him over from those girls, you release your anger on me. How could you fear the strong but bully the weak? Scarlett, why did you channel your grievances to me?"

Her words depicted Ashton as a womanizer and also implied that I was a worthless third wheel. I knitted my brows. This is getting interesting.

I stared at her in the eyes. "If one only knows how to pass the blame to others without reflecting on oneself, one will end up bearing the pain and shame as a total failure."

I was reluctant to meddle in the affairs of others. All I ever wanted was to live life according to my preference.

When I got back to the house, Ashton had already picked Summer up from school. She had plucked a lot of fruits and was enjoying the watermelon scoop after scoop.

Summer was extremely excited to see me. "Mommy, you're back!" She put her watermelon aside and dashed over to hug me.

"Mr. Fuller said he's making chicken wings for dinner. We're just waiting for you."

Having not seen Ashton around, I asked, "Where's he?"

She pointed at the backyard. "He said that you have some clothes that can't be washed by the machine, so he's washing them by hand."

Astonished, I walked to the backyard. Which of my clothes is not machine washable?

I saw him squatting beside the tub and scrubbing the clothes. He changed from his regular dark colored suit into the beige casual pajamas I bought for him from the city.

I never thought he would wear anything other than high-quality tailored clothing.

I was mortified to see him washing my undergarments from last night.

He turned and cast a gentle gaze at me. "You're back? Just wait for a moment. You can have some watermelon prepared by Summer, just don't eat too much of it till your stomach hurts."

I don't know how a blissful life looks like, but I think it's similar to this.

I did not answer. Instead, I approached him and took over the washing. Blushing, I told him I would do it myself.

His brows furrowed. "I'm almost done. Just leave it to me."

Then he nudged me with his elbow. Seeing Summer was just around the area, he insisted, "Bring your mommy to have some watermelon."

This is not the Ashton I know. Come to think of it, he's about thirty-five or thirty-six now. He's becoming more dependable as he ages.

Knowing that he had the upper hand, I went back to the main house feeling a little uneasy.

I've roughly read some from the internet regarding what Joyce said today. News travel fast, especially the juicy ones revolving around the prominent figures in K City.

Nowadays, rich and handsome bachelors are more appealing than young teen idols.

With the media and paparazzi zero in on his private life, it's inevitable that they would dig out something sensational. Rebecca's existence doesn't matter to me.

As for Nancy, she rose to stardom two years ago and her popularity continues to soar with each drama she stars in. Fuller Corporation invests a lot in her, so there're no qualms for Ashton to bring her along in some social events.

As time goes by, these topics and highlights are magnified by the media. The truth doesn't matter anymore.

I live in R Province with Summer. I won't reject his visit and neither will I keep him when he leaves. There're many uncertainties in life. There's no disappointment if I don't put any hope in it.

Soon, it was dinnertime.

Ashton cooked and plated the dishes. Suddenly, we heard someone knocking on the door. Summer darted across to open it.

It was none other than Colin and Michael.

The father and son brought some freshly caught lobsters.

Entering the house, Colin was briefly surprised to see Ashton. He handed me the lobsters and said, "I bought it from an elderly man when I was picking Michael up this afternoon. Michael is allergic to lobsters, but Summer loves them. Keep them now and cook for her tomorrow."

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I nodded and took the lobsters from him. Then I ushered him to take a seat.

This was their first official meeting, though both Ashton and Colin had met each other before. They were about the same age.

After shaking hands and exchanging smiles, they sat down and talked about the economy.

Ashton turned to me with a smile. "You have alcohol at home?"

I nodded. "Is wine okay?" We had too many grapes, so I used some and made them into wine.

He chuckled. "Sure. It's impolite not to serve our guest with a bottle of wine."

Colin was rather stunned by his statement.

I laughed. After getting the wine, I went back to the living room and found the two chit-chatting away harmoniously. Their topic seemed to be revolving around me.

I took my seat. Colin said, "I've known you for so long but never knew you can't consume shrimps."

I cast a look at Ashton, who was uncorking wine collectedly.

Transferring my gaze from him to Colin, I clarified, “Not exactly. Summer likes it, so I eat it too sometimes.”

I developed a condition during postpartum. Having seafood sometimes makes me sick, so I try to avoid it whenever I can. However, it doesn't mean that I can't eat it totally.

Colin curled his lips upward. Ashton poured him a glass. “Thank you for taking care of Scarlett all these years.”

I haven't told anyone about my relationship with Ashton. Colin suspected it before, but as a gentleman, he never asks. Hence, I never told him.

Both men enjoyed their wine merrily.

After a few glasses, they became friendlier with each other and their pool of common topics grew larger.

Ashton was a legendary businessman in K City. If his business decisions and activities in J City were considered reserved, then his development in K within the last four years had fully showcased his ability and potential.

Under his leadership, Fuller Corporation propelled into an excellent listed company within a short span of four years. He had boldly invested in a plethora of projects across all industries, with a lucrative return in investments.

A man like him was very much desirable amongst the ladies and well-liked by the men, too.

The children went to bed early. Summer had gone back to her bedroom whereas Michael slept soundly on Colin's lap.

Seeing that, the men did not continue their conversations.

After Colin left, Ashton washed the dishes and cleaned the table. I complimented him, "Ashton, you've become really dedicated and steadfast."

He teased, "How should I praise you in return? You've become gentle?"

I burst out laughing while bringing the table cloth back to the kitchen.

He collected the utensils and took the cloth from me. "I'll do it. Go ahead and wash up, then go check on Summer."

He insisted. I obliged.

When I came back from Summer's room, he had finished cleaning up and was lying down in the living room. His eyes were shut and his breathing was slow. He seemed to be asleep.

I took a blanket from the bedroom and put it on him. Accidentally, my hand brushed his shoulder and woke him up.

As we stared into each other's eyes, I did not know what to do and found myself lost in his.

There was a twinkle in his eyes. "I saw you in my dreams a few times, but you weren't there when I opened my eyes. Each time that happens, I'm left with a void in my heart."

I was distracted by his words. The weight of his intense gaze made me flush.

I avoided eye-contact with him and sat on the sofa. Checking the time, I reminded him, "It's late. You should go back to the guest room."

He reached out to me and placed my hand on his palm. "I've contacted the school in K City. If you will, bring me and Summer along," he uttered.

I smiled. "You don't need me to bring you there."

He continued to stare me in the eyes. "Wherever you are, I'll be there."

I felt so uncomfortable and covered his eyes with my hands. "We'll talk about this in the future."

He acknowledged and then pulled me closer. Burying his head in my neck, he exclaimed, "You smell good."

Before anything could happen, I stood up and said quickly, "Go to bed early."

During his stay here, we had been very cautious in our interactions. He remained a gentleman and nobody crossed the line.

The next day, we seized the opportunity of having the weekend to rest and relax.

Summer wanted to go out and play. R Province was a small place with limited options for amusement parks. Ashton drove around the city center as we shopped and wandered around.

I was not very happy that he bought Summer so many things. "It's not good for you to spoil her."

There're many ways to show affection to a child. It's not wise nor beneficial to pamper her blindly.

He pressed his lips into a thin line. "I've missed four years of her childhood and couldn't control myself. Sorry."

I was shocked to hear him apologized but accepted it anyway.

Summer wanted to eat fried chicken. It was her monthly request, so I agreed.

The big screen at the mall was advertising the jewelry commercial endorsed by Nancy.

Sitting at the restaurant, we could see the screen clearly. Tabloids about her were also published in the magazines displayed at the reception counter.

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Basically, all the gossips revolving around Nancy was related to Ashton. Anyhow, the magazine did not publish his front profile blatantly.

He was looking at Nancy with his back at the camera. It seemed like a photo taken during an event.

Obviously, the reporters did that to boost the sale of the magazine.

“It’s all nonsense,” he said abruptly.

Startled by his words, I withdrew my gaze from the magazine and looked at him. “What did you order?”

“A family bucket, ice-cream, hamburgers, coke, and French fries.” Summer was thrilled!

I frowned. “Can we finish them?”

She sulked. “Mommy, I can only eat this once a month. I must satisfy my cravings.”

Ashton concurred with her logic and it made me upset. “Summer, eating and working are the same, don’t bite more than you can chew. When you can’t finish it, you waste money. When you can’t deliver a promise, there’s a price to pay and you might even lose the person you love. Do you understand?”

A crease formed between Ashton’s brows. “She’s only four!”

“It’s the same even if she’s a year old. There’s no need to wait until she’s eighteen to understand the principle that she can learn now.” I might have sounded harsh, but I strongly feel that these are things that Summer needs to grapple with at an early age.

He sighed and indicated for us to wait at our table.

Summer seemed to have realized she over ordered. She kept silent for a while and then approached me. “Mommy, I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

I nodded. My eyes were fixed on Ashton as he walked toward us.

He put the food on the table and told Summer, “Eat whatever you like and enjoy yourself.”

She waited for my approval before digging in.

I did not have much appetite. The big screen caught my attention. It was still broadcasting the videos of Nancy promoting the jewelry.

“Whether it’s Rebecca or Nancy, to me, it’s all for show. If you mind, I won’t bring along a female companion to any social events.” He sounded firm.

I heaved a soft sigh. “You don’t need to do that. I’ve found my life’s goal and I know what I want. You don’t have to worry about what I think.”

He grimaced. "So, you're mad at me?"

I denied because I did not care. "Regardless of who you're with, these are just tactics used by the media to entertain its audience. They can do that at our expense, but we shouldn't dwell in it."

A warm smile settled on his face. "I'll cook tonight."

I chuckled.

"Huh? Didn't we plan to dine out tonight? Are we still going for a movie later?" asked Summer with a greasy mouth.

Her reaction made us laugh. Ashton cleaned her mouth and replied gently, "Whatever you say."

Summer made the call for the rest of the outing and the day seemed so perfect.

When we returned home, it was already late. The exhausted Summer fell asleep on Ashton.

Maybe we walked too much the entire day. My previously injured foot started throbbing painfully.

Post injury effects?

Ashton sent Summer back to her room. When he got out, he saw me pouring hot water into a bucket. Without hesitating, he took over and tested the water temperature.

Seemingly, the water was too hot. Thus, he added some cold water. Thereafter, he untied my shoelaces, intending to wash my feet for me.

I blocked his hands and refused. "I can do it on my own."

He was adamant. "The old injury hasn't healed completely. Apply some ointment after soaking your feet in the hot water."

As he spoke, he immersed his long fingers into the water.

Some fates are inextricably intertwined. I can't seem to get rid of him.

He helped me massaged my ankle. "There must be many happenings going on in K City. You've been staying here for a long time. It's time to go back."

He lifted his head. "Are you asking me to leave?"

"It's a suggestion."

He kept quiet as he continued to massage my ankle attentively.

It had almost been two weeks since he came to R Province. I know how busy it could get at Fuller Corporation. He was always seen engaging in virtual meetings on his laptop and settling a lot of documents.

Even so, the heart of Fuller Corporation was in K City. Clearly, his stay in R City would never be a viable long-term solution.

I was so used to having three meals a day and managing major and menial tasks in the yard. Therefore, I was reluctant to live with him in K City and surrounded by the hustle and bustle.

It may seem that his subtle intrusion into my life has portrayed a harmonious union between us two. It's actually just an illusion because he will leave ultimately.

It was a starry night. I could not fall asleep as I pondered over Summer's future.

I knew better than anyone that she didn't belong in R Province. I might have found my peace and my pace of life, but she was only a child who needed exposure and a better environment to learn and enrich her life.

