

When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 983-987

Chapter 983

I nodded. My mind was still a wreck.

By the time the children finished eating, the sun had long disappeared below the horizon. The matriarch lay down some mats in the small house. Brandon explained that this situation could not be helped and urge us to make do. We were going to return the next day.

Boris was afraid that I could catch a cold at night. He forced the woman to bring out all the blankets in the house. Alas, it was still not warm enough and I snuggled next to the children.

In the middle of the night, my freezing feet kept sleep at bay. I curled into a ball. At this moment, a young girl's voice called out. "Ma'am!"

I wondered if my mind was playing tricks on me and did not react immediately. But I soon heard the little girl's voice again. "Are you asleep, Ma'am?"

This time, I was sure that the child was addressing me. I got over my astonishment and replied, "No. What's up?"

I sat up and noticed that the little girl was squatted next to me. "Mommy told me that I have to go with you tomorrow. She said we'll have delicious food in the city. Can you bring my sister too? She also wants to go to the city," she said.

Her words took me off guard. I pulled her closer to me and wrapped her cold body with a blanket. “Why do you want your sister to come with us?”

The child did not move. Although she felt frightened, she responded, “Ma’am, you smell so good. You smell much better than Mommy.”

I could not help but smile as I waited for her reply.

However, she seemed wholly distracted by my scent. I asked again, “Little girl, why does your sister want to go to the city? How old is she?”

She focused on my question this time. “She’s seventeen years old. Mommy says that she’s old enough to get married. She buried herself in her education, but Daddy won’t let her study anymore. He wants her to get married but she doesn’t want to. Mommy locked her up in the barn because of this. I feel so sad for my sister. She hasn’t eaten in days. But, Mommy will starve her to death if she continues to reject the marriage proposal.”

The child’s words stunned me and I did not know how to respond. Soon, I collected myself and asked, “Can you take me to see your sister?”

She nodded and stood up. Despite being barefooted, she seemed ready to walk out. I pulled her back and whispered, “It’s cold outside. You should put on more clothes and wear shoes.”

She seemed blasé as she replied, “It’s fine. I’m not cold. My siblings and I have gone barefoot in colder winters than this. Mommy says that we won’t be cold once we get used to it.”

I pursed my lips but did not comment further. I followed her out and she pulled me towards a door. She removed the lock and whispered, “Are you asleep?”

Sounds of rustling could be heard from within, followed by the voice of a young girl. “Not yet.”

The little girl pushed open the door. It was pitch dark inside but she stepped in without hesitation. I was slightly hesitant, and she turned to say to me in hushed tones, "Don't come in. It's very dirty in here and is full of poop."

She turned back and said into the darkness, "I brought the lady as you wanted. Beg her to take you to the city too. Then, you won't have to get married."

I fished out my phone and turned on its flashlight. I swept the room with the light and was stupefied. It was just as the little girl had said. The small hut was full of poop and hay. Puddles of rainwater could not be discerned from puddles of urine.

The girl that was locked inside was dressed in thin clothes. All she had on was a short-sleeved shirt and black track pants. She must have worn it for years because the knee area had been patched up multiple times. The pants were too short as they rose above her ankles. The girl was leaning against a cow but when she saw us, she retreated even further. She shielded her eyes against the light and whimpered, "Don't force me anymore, Mom. I'll die!"

The little girl next to me hastily said, "She's not Mommy. She's the lady that came to our house and said that she's going to take me to the city. She's really pretty!"

The captive girl narrowed her eyes. Her youthful face was pale and her lips were chapped from dehydration. She gaped at me and said with unexpected composure, "Are you the one who wants to take my sister to the city so she can sacrifice her organs for your daughter?"

The way she put it was distasteful. However, upon further pondering, she was right. I pursed my lips and nodded. "Yes. Please don't worry. I'll take good care of her."

She sneered at me. "Of course, you should. They might not be aware, but I am. Amy is only five years old, but you're making her give up her organs. She might even die under the knife. Since you're spending tens of thousands to trade her life for your daughter's, taking care of her is the least you should do."

Chapter 984

The girl's words cut deep. I pressed my lips together silently. I did not see a point in rebuking her. Initially, I was confused as to why Brandon would bring us here. But now, I was starting to see the light.

After a while, the girl looked at me and continued, "I know my sister can save your daughter. So, let's make a deal. I want you to promise me something."

I knitted my brow and replied, "I'll consider it if it's reasonable. Otherwise, I'll have to refuse."

"Take me along with my sister. I can't wait for my death here. My mother wants to marry me off to a moron and I don't want to live a life like that. I don't need you to do anything for me. As long as you take me to the city, I'll leave you alone and you won't have to see me ever again. I just want to get out of here. I don't want to spend my life here."

There was ambition and earnestness in the girl's eyes. I could tell that she was truly desperate. My younger self would have pitied her and immediately agreed.

But, I hesitated. After all, this place was utterly alien to me, and so was this girl. I had no idea what went on between she and her parents. Before I could figure out why they were keeping her prisoner, I could not interfere recklessly as an outsider. The consequences could be dire.

I looked at her and said calmly, "I can take you. But, I have to know why do you want to leave this place and why are you being locked inside here? One more thing, will your parent allow you to go off like this. Without your parents' permission, I could be causing trouble for myself by taking you with me. If you really care for your sister, you shouldn't use her as a bargaining chip. You know that we'll pay for your sister's sacrifice. This is a fair transaction. However, you have requested my help and my moral side would likely oblige. If everything is in check, I'll agree to that!"

She hugged her bony body and smiled coldly as she scoffed. "You city folk sure know how to extol morals. You disregarded a life once you ascertained that it'll be able to save your daughter. How cruel is that! Fine, drawing the lines clearly shows that you're a rational person. I'll tell you everything."

I was not an unreasonable person. However, once I finished hearing what the girl had to say, I was rather shocked. Her name was Ann and she was the eldest daughter in her family.

In this remote mountain village, there were not many other ways to earn money other than tending to the fields. However, four or five years ago, the country's plan to increase led the villagers to come up with a new way to earn money. They would pad their pockets by having more children.

At some point in time, a few outsiders came to take some children away. In return, they paid the parents tens of thousands in living expenses. Since they were all village children, many did not have identification documents. However, some children were sent back, while others were not.

Those that came back were considered lucky. Even though their health had deteriorated, at least they were back. The families of those that did not return would receive a few hundred thousand. It was as though they were paying for the life of that child, but the fate of that child remained a mystery.

Every family had about seven or eight children. Hence, the loss of one or two did not make much of an impact because they could always give birth to more. As such, no one cared about the children if they returned and fell sick or found out from them about what they had been through.

Several families moved away from the village after they made more money from this trade. The families that stayed either had not met a generous buyer or the wives could no longer give birth anymore and they did not have the heart to trade in their healthy children for money. Thus, it was easier to spend their days tending the field.

As I listened to her explanation, my heart went out to her. She sneered at me and derided, "Don't you think those people are ridiculous? You saw for yourself. My mother had nine children and I'm the oldest of the lot. The older ones like me are of no use for the trade, which is why she wants to marry me off and gain a small sum of dowry. She served me up to a moron for a measly amount of money. If I hadn't gone to school and seen how children from other places lived, I might have resigned myself to my fate. But, I have seen how the other children of my age live, and the kind of families they have. I can't stand it. It's not fair that she gets to decide how the rest of my life goes and seal my fate by sending me to my doom. I want to leave this place and never come back."

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I pursed my lips. Seeing her resentful expression, I felt complicated, not knowing how to console her. Yet, it didn't seem like she needed my consolation either.

After a while, I spoke up, "I totally understand how you feel, and I empathize with you, but this is just your side of the story. Besides, I shouldn't stir up trouble in this place."

Hearing that, she sneered, "Whatever! I know it's just your excuse. It's fine if you're unwilling to help me out, but I will never marry him. I am the master of my fate; no one gets to decide my future for me."

It was late already, and my phone almost ran out of battery. I left the cowshed, with Amy following suit as she locked it.

After hesitating for a while, I asked, "Isn't there anything to eat at home? Why didn't you prepare some food for your sister?"

The little girl replied, "Nope, there's nothing to eat. We don't even have leftovers if my mom doesn't prepare food for Ann, so she could only starve."

Back in the room, I couldn't seem to sleep.

Ann's words kept playing in my mind. No wonder Brandon was so familiar with this village. It turned out that it was not his first time visiting this place. I wondered how many children had died at this man's hand.

That night, I didn't manage to sleep well. At dawn, when I almost drifted off to sleep, I was awakened by the sound of people quarreling noisily from outside.

Ronald and the children were not in the house. After getting out of bed, I smoothed out my clothes and saw that wet shoes were dried by the fireplace. Just then, Amy came rushing in with her tear-stricken face. She dragged me out of the house though I was still putting on my shoes. "Ms. Stovall, please save my sister. She's almost beaten to death by my mom."

In my daze, I followed Amy out to find Ann sprawling on the ground outside the cowshed. The cow dung soiled her shabby clothes. The poor young lady was rolling over the ground as her mother hit her with an iron rod. Since it rained yesterday, there were blackish water puddles of rainwater mixed with coal all over the ground. It seemed like Ann was injured; her already scruffy clothes were smeared with blood.

"You're a burden to the family! It's a waste of food to feed you. You should be grateful when we let you live until now. How dare you injure your brother! I'll beat you to death! That will teach you a lesson!" The woman, who behaved meek and submissive yesterday, unhesitatingly struck her daughter with the iron rod.

Amy was pleading with me earnestly, and it was heartbreaking to see Ann whimpering in pain. I wanted to stop that woman, yet Boris halted me. He slightly shook his head at me, signaling me not to stir up trouble for myself.

Ann was in a terrible condition, yet Ronald, the man who was supposed to be here to stop his wife, was nowhere to be seen. I crouched down before Amy and asked, "Amy, tell me what happened? Where is your father?"

The latter was crying her heart out seeing her sister being beaten up. "Ann injured my brother. My dad just sent him to the hospital. My mom said she is going to kill Ann if anything happens to my brother. Ms. Stovall, please save her!" she choked out.

At that moment, I was stumped, for it was not my place to meddle in the siblings' conflict. Fortunately, that woman grew tired of beating Ann. Pointing at the young lady, she scolded, "If you weren't worth some money. I would've beaten you to death. Don't you ever try to run away from the village! If anyone dares help you escape, I will chop them with a cleaver. I have accepted the dowry from the Leeroy family, so you have no choice but to marry their son!"

Ann glared at her mother, her eyes full of hatred and hostility. "I won't let you ruin my life! I'd rather die than marry that retard! And also, I never regret injuring your son because he deserves it! He has always

bullied me. I won't let you use the dowry for his university fees. He is nothing but a useless prick, and he will never succeed in life! I'll wait and see you guys rot in this slum!"

"You little b*tch!" the woman cursed. "How dare you curse my son! Do you really think you could change your fate just because you've received an education? Dream on! You only deserve to be someone else's maid. I know you're very ambitious, but don't you ever dream of abandoning us for the city! And you even dare to curse my son! Hmph! I will make sure you live a miserable life!"

I was at a loss seeing how the mother was swearing like a trooper at her daughter. Despite having blood ties, the two were at daggers drawn. That woman was treating her daughter like her enemy.

I thought every parent would love their children and wish for the best for them. Yet, this woman in front of me didn't even deserve to be a mother.

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Ann was badly beaten and left to die in the cowshed. After that, that woman pretended as if nothing untoward had happened as she bragged with the onlookers about how good she was in disciplining her daughter.

Her other children kept their heads down, their bodies shivering in fear. They were badly frightened to see their mother hitting their eldest sister with that iron rod. As for Amy, the little girl was sobbing, yet she dared not utter a single word.

After dismissing the crowd, that woman invited us, "My husband asked me to prepare food for you. You should join us for lunch. Today is that little bi*ch's big day, and we will be inviting the village folks to the house. Why don't you guys stay for dinner before leaving?"

I was still in a state of shock while Boris uttered a response, accepting the invitation. Seeing Amy holding my hand, the woman smiled broadly. "Ms. Stovall, it looks like Amy gets along pretty well with you. That's great!"

I forced a smile in response. At the same time, my heart was overwhelmed with mixed emotions.

I had no idea if that woman knew Amy was going to become my daughter's organ donor. Does she know how painful it is to donate bone marrow? Has she ever thought of how helpless her daughter will feel on the operating table? Does she even care about what her daughter will be facing?

Or, perhaps she doesn't care at all. All she cares about is the money she can get from "selling" her daughter.

The village had a poor signal. Thus, I didn't receive a reply message from Ashton since last night. That afternoon, Brandon had a walk around the village while that woman was busy preparing lunch.

It was no longer raining. The woman asked her children to sweep the water off the small patch of the cement floor and carried the small table and chairs out of the house. Since the table couldn't fit all of them, she asked the children to borrow a table from the neighbor. When everything was set, she started serving lunch.

Meanwhile, Amy was holding my hand, whispering in my ears, "Ms. Stovall, Ann asked if you could bring her along with you?"

I was at a loss for words. After all, I was not a local. I couldn't possibly take Ann away with me. Even if she sneaked out with me, I was afraid the villagers might find out about it before we even get to leave the village.

Amy was upset when she saw me furrowing my brows. Nevertheless, she sneaked out to find Ann. Although I knew the sisters would be disappointed, I still didn't agree to their request.

After all, I was pregnant with a baby. I couldn't afford to put myself and the baby in danger. If I stirred up any trouble, Boris alone might not be able to protect me.

Soon, Ronald was back in his motorbike. Riding the pillion was a tall teenager with tanned skin. His gaze was cold and... lecherous?

How could a teenager have such a nasty gaze? I must have seen it wrongly, or I'm just overthinking. I furrowed my brows and shook the thought off my mind.

Meanwhile, Ronald helped the teenager get off the motorbike. His wife rushed up to the teenager and carried him on her back as if she had done it a million times. "Oh, my baby boy, what did the doctor say about your injury? Are you alright?"

With his brows knotted, Ronald said unhappily, "Ann wanted to end our family line when she kicked our son hard in the nuts. Fortunately, the doctor said he will recover. Carry him into the house and take good care of him. I'll go find Ann and teach that little b*ith a lesson!"

I was shocked to hear such nasty and humiliating words from a father.

That woman couldn't agree more with her husband. "The Leeroy family will be here soon. If today was not her big day, you would've beaten that b*tch to death for what she did!" she said viciously.

Ronald opened the gate of the cowshed. He didn't enter but berated his daughter at the entrance, "Ann Weeder, you almost ended our family line! He is your brother! How could you do that to him?"

Ann's laughter, which carried with it a tinge of bitterness, was heard from inside the cowshed. "Why didn't you ask me the reason for me doing that to him? He is your son, but am I not your daughter? Do I deserve to be treated like dirt? Ronald Weeder, you treat your son as if he's the king, and we are his maids. You wouldn't hesitate to exploit and sell your daughters for him. Karma will get you!"

Ronald paid no heed to his daughter's words. He uttered harshly, "Don't cause any more trouble! It's your fate to marry that intellectually disabled son of the Leeroy family. Your life will only be meaningful after you get pregnant and give birth to a boy. You have no choice but to marry that man, or you can choose to die out there. There is no place for you anymore in this family."

Is that what a father is supposed to say to his daughter? In the cowshed, Ann let out a bitter laugh that sounded sorrowful to me.

After scolding his daughter, Ronald went back into the house. He even smiled at us when he walked past us. At that moment, I felt awful.

Chapter 987

Being frightened, the rest of the girls stood meekly by the side as Ronald entered the house. Then, they continued helping their mother in the kitchen. I could already tell their fate; these poor little girls would eventually end up like Ann.

I'm not a saint. Even if I could save Ann, I couldn't possibly save the rest of the girls.

The few families in the village had all come to the house. There were two dishes—Shepherd's pie and Caesar salad. Since there were not enough seats, the guests took turns eating at the table. After that, the women gather around and shot the breeze while taking care of their children.

Brandon was back soon. One of the villagers came up to him and asked, "Mr. Dumphy, do you still have other clients? I have five children, and all of them are very healthy."

Brandon frowned slightly while he replied, "Not for now. Don't worry. I will inform you guys when there is a need."

These people have no scruples about selling their children for money! I could barely contain myself when Boris whispered to me, "Don't think too much. Everyone has their own way of living. They might be forced, or they do it as a matter of course. This is none of our business. Remember, you need to take care of your safety."

Hearing that, I pursed my lips and lowered my head.

After the meal, the bridal car—a dusty white van arrived to fetch the bride. In fact, if it wasn't for the flower garland that was dangling from the rear-view mirror, no one would know it was a wedding car.

Soon after, Ronald dragged Ann out of the cowshed. Everyone was shocked by the bride's slovenly and disheveled appearance.

Ann looked at me when she was being dragged into the house. She didn't call for help nor make any resentful remarks. Yet, I felt unsettled under the young lady's innocent gaze. At that instant, I was eaten up by guilt.

Gazing at me, Boris advised, "Ms. Stovall, we're only here for Amy. That's none of our business. We shouldn't interfere at all."

Hearing that, I pursed my lips. If Ashton was here, perhaps I could do as I wished. Yet, even if I could save Ann, I couldn't possibly save the other girls that might end up just like her. They could rely on no one but themselves to change their fate.

Soon, Ann came out of the house in a threadbare red suit and black pants. Her messy hair was now neatly combed, styled with a bunch of flowers.

Ronald and his wife helped her out of the house and handed her to the two men waiting to fetch the bride. Grabbing her arms, the two men brought her into the van.

The crowd all had bright smiles on their faces to express the joy of witnessing the wedding. No one seemed to have noticed Ann's sorrow. Or rather, no one cared about it.

After the van drove off, only then did the woman let her other daughters have their food and instructed them to clean the house after the guests left. Then, she and Ronald started exchanging inexhaustible pleasantries with Brandon and me.

Before we left, Brandon handed Ronald an envelope with about twenty thousand cash inside. "Take this money first. If the operation is successful, Ms. Stovall will thank you again."

Holding the envelope, the two of them were elated as they thanked me profusely.

I was at a loss when suddenly, I felt warmth in my hand. I lowered my head to see Amy stuck her hand in mine. The little girl asked, "Ms. Stovall, are we leaving now?"

My heart ached to hear that. How horrible this family must be when even a five-year-old kid would want to leave without any hesitation.

"We're leaving immediately." With that, I led Amy to where our car was being parked, leaving Brandon to communicate with Ronald and his wife.

The road was in poor condition, with the muddy and uneven road surface. When we reached the car, Boris opened the boot and took out the presents we bought on our way here. He handed one of them to Amy and the rest to the girls who followed us to the car.

Being a man of few words, he got into the car after distributing the gifts. Through the girls' eyes, I could see their reluctance to part with Amy and their envy for her, for the latter could finally leave the family.

When Ronald saw the gifts in the girls' hands, he cast his eyes at me and made a meaningful remark, "There is no use in giving those gifts. They can only count on themselves to change their own fate. Let's go. We need to head back to A City."

In the car, I sat with Amy in the rear seat. The little girl was excited as she kept casting her eyes outside the car window. It seemed to be her first time riding a car. From the smile on her face, I could tell that she was happy.