

In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 1531

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John wasted no time in pulling out his phone and placing it next to his ear. He listened intently, his expression slowly growing solemn.

“What is it?” I hurriedly asked.

He gave me a sidelong glance, nodding. “The mission was a success.”

I felt myself let go of a breath that I hadn’t realized I’d been holding, and Ashton’s eyebrows finally stopped furrowing together.

Ashton himself was very aware of how selfish his methods had been, and had been working on improving himself to become a better person.

Last night had been a test. If he failed, he might have lost the courage to continue staying by my side. Only succeeding would be enough to prove to himself that he’d changed into a true man that would do anything to protect me and my family.

Ashton sighed deeply, as did I. Our eyes met and we exchanged relieved, wry smiles.

“Now that everything’s done and settled, I’ll go over to pick them up. You two recently recovered from being sick and stayed up through the whole night; hurry up and go upstairs to rest.”

John got ready to leave after saying that, but Ashton grabbed ahold of his arm. “Joseph will take care of it. Emma and Drew will be arriving this afternoon, and are you sure you want to meet them while in this state?”

“Emma?” John blinked owlishly at him. “What are you talking about?”

Ashton let go of his arm, heading towards me. "I arranged a private flight to M Country for them two days ago," he told him over his shoulder. "They should already be on the way here as we speak."

John and I wore mirrored expressions of surprise. "You'd made preparations that early on?"

Ashton wrapped an arm around my shoulders, his eyes shining humorously. "A family reunion would be incomplete without even a single family member, after all. Besides, my dear brother-in-law seemed extremely temperamental as a result of not being able to see his wife and child for a long time. So, I did this all for the sake of maintaining the peace at home."

John squinted at him, raising an eyebrow. "That sounds very much like a complaint."

"Was I wrong, Honey?" Ashton shrugged and turned the focus of the conversation towards me.

"Uh..." How am I supposed to respond? John was glaring at me icily from the other side of the room, while Ashton, mere inches away from me, was trying his best to look as pitiful as possible.

Looking between them both, I groaned and squirmed out of Ashton's arms. "I'm getting sleepy, so ask me later after I wake up," I waved them off, yawning as I dragged my feet upstairs. "I'm leaving the three kids to you guys. I want a good sleep, and I won't tolerate anyone who comes to disturb me! Bye!"

Ashton trailed behind me, jokingly threatening, "You heard her! Letty said that she's leaving the kids to you, so I'm going to go up and accompany her. She won't be able to sleep well otherwise."

"Hey! The both of you— What do you think you're doing?" John chased us all the way to the staircase, shaking his fist at us as Ashton ascended the stairs three steps at a time. In the blink of an eye, John was left staring at an empty staircase. "I'm the president of a company, not your babysitter!"

His complaints echoed in the hallway and all around the living room.

It might have been the weekend, but children's biological clocks were always accurate to a tee. Much to John's dismay, he could only get about three hours' worth of rest before he had to wake up to take care of the three kids.

I grew drowsy the moment my head hit the pillow, only vaguely registering the mattress shifting under me as Ashton laid down on the bed as well. Too tired to give any sort of reaction, I sleepily mumbled out, "We'll be okay from now on out, right?"

"Yes." He pulled me into his arms, burying his face in the crook of my neck. "Sleep. Arrangements have already been made for Uncle Louis and the others to rest somewhere else nearby. I'll wake you when they return."

His words acted like a sedative, instantly calming any leftover adrenaline rushing through me. Surrounded by his warmth and familiar scent, I drifted off to sleep.

When I came to, the bedroom was peacefully quiet. It seemed that I was the only one left at home.

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Thinking that Ashton had left to handle the issue with Nicolas, I headed downstairs to make a phone call.

It was only when I arrived at the living room that I saw him and the kids all sitting on a sofa, each one of them as quiet as a mouse.

My husband was holding a tablet, probably working. Gregory was having online classes with earphones plugged in, while Summer was reading a thick book. Even Audrey was keeping herself entertained by sitting down at a table and practicing her handwriting.

There was something amiss about the entire scene.

Ashton was the first one to notice my presence, putting his tablet down and walking over to place a kiss on my forehead. "You're awake."

“Mhm,” I nodded. “You guys...?”

Audrey immediately jumped up at the sound of my voice, loudly announcing, “Mommy! Daddy was being mean and didn’t let me talk!”

Summer quickly reached over to tickle her little sister in an attempt to get her to shut up. “That’s because you were being too noisy and woke Daddy up! It would be bad if you woke Mommy up too, you tiny monkey.”

“No, I didn’t!” Audrey argued through a fit of giggles, scrambling away from Summer’s hands. “Uncle John said—”

Realizing that she was about to expose her uncle, she instantly stopped herself short and pursed her lips together.

Of course, I wasn’t that easily fooled by a kid who wore her heart on her sleeve.

“How long did you sleep for?” I asked Ashton.

“Daddy woke up early in the morning and helped Audrey wash up,” Summer interrupted before he could say anything.

Doesn’t that mean that he’d taken John’s place and only slept for three hours?

That realization tugged at my heartstrings a little. Just then, John walked in from outside, meeting my knowing gaze and then taking a look at Audrey.

He awkwardly shuffled towards the other side of the living room, mumbling in a small voice, “Don’t blame me. Audrey’s your biological child, so she ran to find you guys as soon as she woke up. I couldn’t have stopped her even if I tried.”

I hid a laugh behind my hand. “So you went back to sleep and left Ashton to take care of the kids alone?”

"She's your daughter," he shrugged. I couldn't argue with him on that, and it seemed like he was going to stubbornly defend himself to the very end.

I had no choice but to try and make Ashton go upstairs to rest for a while longer. "Go take a nap or something. You haven't slept well these past few days."

Even though the day before had been because of...

I didn't let myself finish that thought. Regardless, we were no longer in our young adult life; we'd grown old and needed sufficient sleep.

"I'm used to it," Ashton laughed. "I've been surviving on three or four hours of sleep for the past few years. Don't worry about me."

My expression soured. He must have had a rough time while being the Hall family's cash cow for so long.

Noticing that I was upset, he reached up and gently massaged my stiff shoulders. "I'll have plenty of chances to rest in the future," he reassured. "But I want to handle all our current problems before anything else. Next time, you'll be free to determine when I sleep and how much I sleep."

"You swear on your life?" I couldn't stop myself from smiling.

"Of course! I would never dare to lie to my precious wife in front of her brother and our kids."

"Bleurgh. I can't watch this anymore," John shivered exaggeratedly, causing the kids to sneak glances at us and giggle.

I let out a hopeless sigh at the kids' amused expressions. What kind of little monsters were they going to grow up into with such a drama queen for an uncle?

"That's it," John clapped to gain the children's attention. "A whole morning of being under your fascist dad's strict rules is more than enough. Put down your homework and go out to the garden to play."

“Yeah! Uncle John is the best!”

Audrey instantly jumped to her feet, dragging Gregory along to the side door that led to the garden. Laughing excitedly, Summer followed closely behind them.

A six or seven-year-old child was usually at the peak of their mischievousness, but thankfully, we had Summer to help decrease some of the worries we had about the two younger kids.

As soon as they were out the door, John’s face turned solemn. “Nicolas and his wife are being held in a basement. What are we going to do with the remaining Hall family?”

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Ashton’s entire life of pain and suffering had been a direct result of the Hall couple’s actions. It was time for them to reap the consequences of their actions.

But Nathaniel and Tiffany were just byproducts of the twisted, toxic environment cultivated by their parents. They didn’t despise us, and we had no reason to kill each other.

Ashton supported my weight as he helped me walk out the door, merely saying, “Let’s just get it over with.”

I knew the severity and emotions behind that simple sentence and stayed quiet as I let him lead me.

The entrance to the basement was in the garage next to the villa. The mercenaries that John had hired had all changed into casual clothes and were patrolling the area, but that didn’t change the fact that they looked intimidating enough to scare off anyone who might come to rescue the Halls.

Ashton kept one arm firmly around me as we passed them and entered the basement, the floor at our footsteps barely illuminated by the dim overhead lights. After a few turns, we finally saw Nicolas and Simone, locked up in a makeshift jail cell.

Nicolas was still wearing his pajamas, clearly having been taken straight from his home in the middle of his sleep. He stood up straight in the center of the dark cell, stubbornly refusing to let his clothes get dirty as if that would help him maintain his image of a “noble”.

Simone wasn't sitting either, her face looking wrinkled and as pale as a ghost without the help of makeup to cover up her flaws.

They seemed drained, not even noticing us when we entered the room. It was only when we walked forward and stood right in front of Simone that her eyes widened suddenly, lunging forwards to get closer to us. “Ashton! You're finally here! Let us go, we can't stay here a second longer! Please, Ashton, I'm begging you, let us go...”

Nicolas peered at us down his nose, still wearing the same expression of contempt from before.

Ashton ignored Simone, raising his head to stare straight at Nicolas. “You've lost.”

“Hmph...” The older man rolled his eyes. “What do you mean, I've lost? Isn't losing to my own son further proof that I was a successful father?”

“You wish!” spat out John.

Nicolas pushed his glasses further up on his nose bridge before holding his hands behind his back. “I have to say, the drastic measures you took came as a surprise. You've grown up, Ashton. Now I know that I can leave the family business in your hands without any worries.”

“Is that so...?” Ashton's gaze grew sharp, and the temperature around us seemed to drop several degrees as he spoke. “Am I supposed to thank you for that?”

“Of course!” Nicolas raised his voice, strangely confident in his own convictions as he frowned at his son. “Do you really think that you would have survived until now if it weren't for my precious blood running through your veins?”

I'd seen people blow their own trumpet before, but never to this shameless extent. I wasn't even a part of the conversation, but I could feel my jaw clench unconsciously.

Ashton was where he was right now because of his own hard work. If there was anyone he should be grateful towards for having helped him, it should be the Fullers who raised him, and certainly not the Halls who had nearly turned him into a monster.

I glanced at the back of Ashton's large silhouette. He stood unmoving, the only visible proof of his suppressed rage being his clenched fists.

He took a moment to regain his composure and calm himself down. "You could have publicly come out with the truth when you first found out that you were a Hall," he told them calmly. "Why did you have to set up an accident and bring Letty's grandma and the Murphys into this...? You abandoned me, and now you will do nothing but push me up the corporate ladder?"

I swore that I could hear his heart shatter as soon as he got that last sentence out.

My vision blurring with tears, I stepped forward and took his hand in mine, hoping that my touch provided him some comfort.

But Nicolas, the truly twisted being that he was, had the gall to want to take credit for this delicate scene between us.

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"Look at you two! You were made for each other. If I hadn't planned all of that, do you think you would have ever met in the first place? I was the one who gifted you with such a beautiful marriage, my son. How could you bear to blame me for it?"

What?

The culprit is suddenly playing the victim?

"I'm just speaking the truth, but it's up to you whether you want to believe me or not. Our original plan that year had been to

completely wipe you out from existence and forget that we'd ever given birth to such a defective product. If I hadn't pitied you, you would have disappeared because of that car crash a long time ago! What right do you think you have to stand in front of me pretending to be a victor and interrogate your own father?"

Ashton immediately started trembling, digging his nails into his palms so tightly that I could see the veins on his forearms.

In the Hall couple's eyes, Ashton was not only an obstacle blocking their way, he didn't deserve to continue living either.

From their point of view, "family" was nothing more than a manufacturing process. They expected only perfect products and destroyed any that were not "up to par" with the high standard of quality that they'd set.

But they were talking about a person. How could someone say "you should have died a long time ago" to another person so easily?

Ashton didn't speak for a long time. I related to his feelings; the more precious something is to you, the harder it is to cope when it's suddenly destroyed.

Yet, for some reason, Nicolas viewed his silence as silent agreement.

He turned his attention towards me, squinting at me as if we were the ones currently being locked up in a cage. "I must say: your grandma, Winona is a smart woman. She knew to team up with George Fuller and match you two together in order to resolve Ashton's grudge against the Murphy family. Her hard work and care are large reasons why Ashton is where he is today."

"Too bad that the lower-class will always stay lower-class for a reason," he shrugged, starting to pace around the cell. "They never realize when the thing they're trying desperately to protect is stolen from them right under their noses. No, that's not the right way to say it. If it weren't for that petroleum contract, I wouldn't have returned to the Hall family so easily. I should thank her for that."

“You stole the contract?”

If that were the case, then what was the reason for Armond’s stubbornness all these years?

A horrid idea abruptly crossed my mind as soon as the words left my mouth.

Nicolas’ lips quirked up into an evil, satisfied smile. “I guess you’re not as stupid as you look. What do you think? Don’t you want to applaud my perfect scheme and praise my smarts after realizing the truth?”

Praise?

Applaud him for taking away the contract and manipulate Grandma and George in his hands as if they were mere puppets and leading them to their demise?

Or does he mean his scheme to make the Fullers and the Murphys hate each other so that Ashton would live the rest of his life in wrath and loathing?

Ashton might have found himself unable to talk back to his birth parents, but I found no problem in doing so.

“So you saw through the Murphys’ plan since the very beginning and took the chance to pull the wool over their eyes,” I inhaled deeply to calm myself. “Not only did you take away the contract for the petroleum farming project, but you also used the fake death case to escape from the public eye. You left a bunch of crippled victims behind, then proceeded to let Ashton battle the Murphys tooth and nail all alone. Am I right?”

If my assumption was correct, it would mean that I had also been a part of his calculations.

Nicolas merely shrugged in admittance.

The relief of closure was quickly followed by a wave of fury and shock, crashing down and overpowering my rationality.

“You were the one who ruined Ashton as well as Armond! You knew that you could just take the contract away because of your background as a Hall, and the Murphys wouldn’t be able to do anything to stop you. Instead, you wanted Ashton to harbor those unnecessary feelings of revenge against his parents, and you wanted him to be tortured daily by nightmares and guilt! How could you do that to him?”

Nicolas spread his arms wide in a show of self-proclaimed innocence. “If I could perfectly wipe out the bloody past, why would I need to take the risk and get myself involved with those low-class vermin? Besides, I was merely acting in self-defense. The Murphy family had been planning for us to take the fall for their mistakes, but I was brainy enough to find a way out and escape my fate. They wanted to kill me, and Ashton is my son, so it makes sense that he would want to avenge me. What did I do wrong?”

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“The problem is that you’re standing right in front of us, alive and well!” I screamed at him. “You even wanted to take Ashton’s life! You ruined the first half of his life, so who the f*ck do you think you are to stand here and call him your son? A piece of sh*t like you doesn’t deserve to be called a human, let alone a father!”

Nicolas tilted his head, the hints of a smile tugging at his mouth. “I don’t deserve to be a father? And what about you? Do you think that you’re above me? Do you think you deserve to stand up on Ashton’s behalf more than I do?”

“At least I never treated him like a product and threw him away when he was no longer of any use to me,” I spat out venomously. If Ashton didn’t have the heart to deal with this piece of trash, then I wasn’t going to back down on his behalf.

I must have been a sight, my face contorted in rage as I saw red, wishing for nothing more than to tear Nicolas to pieces with my bare hands.

But in the back of my mind, I knew that all I really wanted was to protect the man I loved. Getting myself worked up over Nicolas wasn’t worth it.

Upon hearing my rant, the man in question broke out into a chuckle that grated my ears, grinning meaningfully at me.

“What are you laughing at?” I scowled, unable to stop myself from responding.

Nicolas’ expression was now toned down as he stared at me, but his eyes were devoid of emotion. I felt chills run up my spine at the sight of them. “Women always like to make everything into a soap opera, don’t they? You’re selfless and you’re not scheming, so you expect the same from your partner? Should I tell you about Ashton’s hereditary blindness, and how he kept it under control for so long...”

“That’s enough!” Ashton suddenly interrupted, seemingly refusing to entertain Nicolas any further.

He raised one hand in the air. Soon after, Joseph approached us and opened the cell door, dragging Nicolas out with his arms pinned behind him.

At that same moment, two bodyguards entered the basement carrying a wooden chair. They made a beeline for the cell and set the chair down, taking some ropes out to tie Nicolas up to the chair. After that was done, they secured some sort of metal device to the back of his head, exposing only his face.

Then, some other bodyguards hauled in a large, flat bucket and placed it behind the chair, as well as set up a water pipe right above where the bucket was.

Ashton walked over and kicked the legs of the wooden chair, causing Nicolas to fall backward and land his head in the bucket behind him.

He slowly circled around the older man, observing him carefully. When he reached the water pipe, he turned it on.

A continuous string of drops of water came rushing forth from the pipe, hitting Nicolas’ forehead one after the other without pause.

My breath hitched in my throat. Is this... another form of waterboarding?

Ashton leaned down slightly to make sure that Nicolas would be able to hear him, his eyes fogged over with murderous intent and his tone as cold as ice. "Have a taste of the pain you caused me for months and years."

With that, he walked over towards me and helped me up the stairs out of the basement, stopping in his tracks briefly to call out over his shoulder, "Don't feed them food or water for a week straight."

When we went back to the living room, a group of people in white coats were already there waiting for us.

From what I could recall, the only people associated with Ashton that would look like medical officials were the ones that had been in charge of researching medicine and drugs.

"They invented the very vaccine that Nicolas gave you," Ashton explained to me, confirming my suspicions.

Taking a good look at the group, none of them seemed particularly evil or villainous. If anything, I spotted some fear in their expressions.

John approached the eldest-looking researcher. "Where's the antidote?"

The man, who had been hanging his head, ducked into himself even further. "T- There is no antidote..."

"What?" John grabbed ahold of his collar, shaking him violently as he growled out through gritted teeth, "So you're just going to let her die?"