

In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 1471

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He'd just finished speaking when John violently shrugged him off. Caught off-balance by John's abrupt jerk, Joseph fell to the floor.

Joseph's moans of pains mingled with Audrey's piping voice. Joseph made a great effort to get up, but John cruelly stepped on him, hard, condemning him to lie pinned on the ground.

"You were never a match for me. How dare you touch me? You're really a worthy sidekick for Ashton! A dog behaves exactly like its master. You're both pathetic," John spat resentfully. Every word, though directed at Joseph, was clearly meant for Ashton's ears.

In one swift motion, John took his foot off Joseph, then spun around and sauntered over to Ashton. Without hesitation, John threw a hard punch in Ashton's face, then immediately followed it with a flying kick.

Ashton flew backward, landing on the grass patch by the curbside. He struggled to stand, but John lunged forward and wrapped both arms around Ashton's neck. He strangled Ashton and the latter's face instantly darkened into a deep crimson. The fall had entirely wiped off Ashton's earlier dignified manner.

"You didn't see this coming, did you? I wasn't able to take Letty with me six years ago. I will now," John jeered. Through gritted teeth, he continued, "Look at you. You haven't improved at all. Do you expect to be able to keep Scarlett with you based on that feeble amount of strength alone?"

By then, the servants had all crept out of the main house to watch the scene. They fretted over whether they should intervene but ultimately were overcome by their fear. No one stepped forward.

I, too, was dumbfounded by John's sudden violence. Recovering, however, I glanced at Ashton's pale face in worry.

Is John really intending to kill Ashton? I thought, horrified.

It seemed that I had no cause for concern, however.

When Joseph staggered over, however, intending to wrench John and Ashton apart, John had already taken a few steps back and was dusting his hands.

Beside me, Audrey was still singing blissfully. "Jingle bells, Jingle bells, jingle all the way..."

John coolly straightened his clothes, then directed an icy look at Ashton's crumpled body. John then stepped over to where Audrey and I had been waiting and said tenderly, "Let's go home."

He once again knelt down and tapped Audrey gently on her shoulder for her to turn around.

As if rehearsed, Audrey spun around on her heels gladly. She clung to John, babbling eagerly, "Did you win, Uncle John? Did you win?"

John gazed at her soberly, then thumbed her on the nose. "Of course, I won! How can Uncle John ever lose, huh?"

"Hooray!" Audrey cried. It all seemed like a game to her where Uncle John had warded off the bad guys. However, her eyes darted alertly to Ashton, who was stumbling to his feet behind John. Audrey's little brow furrowed at the sight. She pursed her lips, asking tentatively, "Uncle John, were you fighting that bad man just now?"

Audrey made it perfectly evident that she was rather unimpressed. Her frown had deepened almost into a sulk.

John looked behind him uncertainly. The arrogant demeanor John had been wearing from his earlier victory faded. He suddenly looked rather unsure of himself.

Ashton, to everyone's surprise, rescued John from his humiliation. "Audrey, it's all right. Daddy just tripped over and fell. It doesn't hurt at all!" he said brightly.

One would have almost believed him if not for the bright-red specks of blood around his mouth. His smile was almost a grimace.

As he spoke, Ashton occasionally drew in his breath sharply through his teeth. He was clearly in agony. Looking at the sorry sight he made before us, I felt a surge of pity well up within me.

Ashton, are you sure it doesn't hurt? I wondered.

Audrey was clearly moved. Her large eyes blinked rapidly, tears glittering in them.

Noticing Audrey's distress, John hastily picked her up, soothing her. He pressed Audrey's head into his chest, then turned to look at Ashton scornfully. "I raised Audrey for six years and can count the number of times I've made her cry on one hand. Look at her state after just meeting you once. Do you think she's really better off with you?"

Without waiting for Ashton to respond, John turned to me. "Let's go," he said curtly.

Ashton was clearly incapacitated and could not restrain John. I thus followed John out obediently.

John had parked his car outside the villa. Once the three of us had gotten on, he immediately stepped hard on the accelerator. The car flew towards the suburbs.

"Where are you bringing me to?" I asked curiously.

John gave me a look through the rearview mirror. He then said blandly, "To the airport. I've hired a private plane for us. It'll be arriving shortly."

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John was evidently in a foul mood. I couldn't tell whether he was jealous of the liking that Audrey had taken to Ashton or if other matters were weighing on his mind.

The car rounded a corner. A gray van appeared bearing the Fullers' license plate, which I recognized as the van which had sent Gregory to and fro. I hurriedly wound down the car window, and in

that split second in which our vehicles crossed, I caught sight of Gregory's round face.

Accompanying him on both sides were Tiffany and Thora.

As the distance grew between us, I felt a deepening sense of despair. I hadn't gotten to interact with Gregory much but felt an attachment to him nonetheless from our brief meetings. Now that we were leaving without a word of goodbye, I wondered if Gregory would miss me.

As if she could perceive my desolation, Audrey leaned against me, mewling. She was as soft and forlorn as a newborn kitten.

My heart melted. Casting Gregory to the back of my mind, I reached out and gave Audrey a tight hug.

...

We soon arrived at the VIP lounge in the airport.

The Stovall private jet was estimated to land in two hours. Concerned that Audrey would be hungry, John regarded the fast-food restaurants that lined the hallway with disapproval. He disappeared, then soon returned with a portion of fish and chips that looked entirely superior to the rest of the meager fare offered there.

Taking a leaf out of Gregory's book, Audrey sulked, insisting on being fed before she would be willing to eat.

I was indefensible in the face of Audrey's adorable self. I took extreme pains to coax and flatter her to eat. Fortunately, Audrey was easily won over. As John had promised, she was a lovely, innocent girl who had been pampered but was not yet spoiled.

As Audrey and I took bites in turn, John sat facing us, smiling. It was as if he derived gratification just from watching us.

"I've dreamed of this scene countless times. Alas, it has finally come true," John muttered, half to himself. There was a slight

choke in his voice, and I looked up, startled, to see his eyes shining with tears.

John swiftly wiped at his eyes, but he was overcome with emotion to compose himself immediately.

I felt a lump rise within my throat. I was both immensely moved by the depth of John's feelings and frustrated by my inability to remember anything.

I put down my fork. When I'd caught John's eye, I said gravely, "We're going back to M Country and getting together with the rest of the family, right? What happens after that? What do you plan to do?"

"Isn't that enough?" John broke into a wistful smile at the thought. "I'm no longer the devilish scoundrel I used to be. I'm managing both the Stovall and Moore Corporations, both of which are profiting tremendously now. I've also hired the best mercenaries for you and Audrey. They'll give you the best protection you could ever ask for. No one will ever be able to hurt either of you again."

"What about Gregory?" I replied briefly.

John looked troubled. "There are still days ahead of us. I'll definitely do my best to bring him over."

"When will that be?" I persisted. "If you couldn't manage it for the past six years, what makes you think you'll be able to do that in the future?"

John's face was stony. Grimly, he said, "None of us wanted that, but I was focusing all of my efforts on looking for you and had to give up the custody of Gregory. I'm a mere businessman, not God. I can't perform miracles, much as I try. Gregory was given to the Hall family. That's the only life he knows now. Even if I could take him by force, would he be able to get accustomed to the new environment?"

John's face grew flushed as he spoke, his eyes taking on a feverish glaze. He paused to suppress his agitation, then continued in a strained voice, "Letty, it's been six years. You can't, and neither will I allow you to, continue contacting Ashton and his family. The next time, it may be fatal..."

John's face blanched as he trailed off. I pressed him, however, saying, "Do you mean that what happened six years ago was the work of the Hall family? But the information I received from Ashton said that the person who wanted to destroy the entire island, including Ashton and me, was Armond. Wasn't it?"

"You almost died, yet you're still clinging onto Ashton's words as if they were the gospel truth," John noted disdainfully. "That was a lie spun by the Hall family to deflect blame. Without assistance from the Hall family, Armond would surely have been stopped and killed on sight in the open waters. How else could he have been able to successfully move all those explosives to the island?"

At John's explanation, the last piece of the puzzle seemed to finally click into place. Armond's ability to wreak such havoc no longer seemed that mythical after all.

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A question still lingered at the back of my mind. Disturbed, I wondered, Why on earth would Ashton lie to me?"

Was it because Ashton already knew that I was Scarlett and wanted to distract me from the truth?

John read the uneasiness on my face and remarked somewhat impatiently, "There's no need to overthink things. I simply don't understand how you're willing to overlook the maniacal things that the Hall family has done on Ashton's account. If I had known, I'd have ruined them on the stock market instead."

"What makes you think I will?" I shot back, meeting John's gaze steadily. "What right does someone who harmed me have to raise my children?"

John was taken aback. He leaned forward, spreading his hands on the smooth tabletop. Skeptically, he asked, "Didn't you feel sorry for Ashton when I hurt him?"

"The one who harmed me was the Hall family, not Ashton. Why would you hurt him?" I asked quizzically. Besides, Ashton was the father of my child. I didn't want to see Gregory disconsolate.

John had a grave look on his face. "Don't you know that Ashton is the Hall family's front man right now? Do you think I would have given Gregory up if it hadn't been for Ashton's continued resistance?"

I felt rather disconcerted. It appeared that we were caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, I couldn't just abandon Gregory like that. However, Ashton remained a stubborn obstacle between us.

Just as I was fretting, an idea occurred to me. Turning towards John, I asked, "John, are the mercenaries you hired really the best?"

John looked bewildered by the abrupt shift in the conversation. He scratched his head, then nodded slowly. "What are you planning to do?"

I flashed a wicked grin at John, then said, "Can they help to kidnap two people for me? Wait, one will do."

After all, once one had been kidnapped, the other would surely deliver himself.

"Who do you want to kidnap?" John probed.

Without hesitation, I announced, "Ashton!"

"You want to kidnap him?" John asked, raising an eyebrow. "What do you want to kidnap him for? To teach him a lesson? Have you forgotten when you hated him? Once the matter ended, you'll fall back in love with him all over again, and the blame will fall squarely on me. I'm not taking the fall for this one again." "Of course not!" I assured him, laughing a little at John's panic. "Legal custody of Gregory belongs to the Hall family, but it's under Ashton's name. If we kidnap Ashton and bring Gregory over, we wouldn't be contravening any laws, would we?"

John took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. "Are you serious about that?"

I rearranged my features into the sternest face I could put on, then challenged John, "Do I look like I'm joking?"

John examined me, then said doubtfully, "I can't tell. Women change their minds more quickly than the wind changes."

"Will you help me or not?" I pressed him.

"I'll help," John agreed at last. "It's a huge task, though, so we should plan it well. The luster of the Hall family may have dimmed, but they're not entirely incapable yet. It won't be that easy to lay hands on their sole source of income. Perhaps we should return to M Country first, where the rest of our family is waiting. We shouldn't disappoint them..."

John rambled on, but the rest of his words fell on deaf ears. I wiped my mouth and led Audrey away from the table. "Audrey, are you feeling tired yet? Let's go find a place to sleep."

John stretched out a hand to stop me but quickly withdrew it when I rolled my eyes contemptuously at him. "Letty, don't be reckless. The plane is leaving soon. Let's go home first. As for the kidnapping..."

I had strode to the entrance of the VIP lounge with Audrey with John doggedly tailing us. His words died away at the sight of the airport security. John then quickly corrected himself, "As for that matter, we'll have to wait for a suitable moment."

Audrey and I paid no heed to John. I raised a hand to wave a casual goodbye to him before sauntering away. "Got it! Remember to get the plane to turn back!" I reminded John helpfully.

My reluctance to leave K City actually stemmed from the fact that it was the only place I was familiar with. I hadn't expected that John would let us go so easily. The belligerent man who had held his ground before Ashton had now buckled.

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John drove us to the city's finest hotel. We proceeded straight into the presidential suite.

We had barely sat down when John began video calling the rest of our relatives in M Country. He fixed his phone on the table, angling it such that both Audrey and I also appeared within the frame.

Our call was picked up almost instantly.

The moment Zachary and Cameron flickered into view, their eyes almost immediately glimmered with tears. They seemed so overcome with emotion that they were unable to speak for a while.

Louis had since retired and was in high spirits. He thus spoke first, nodding contentedly, "We are happy to see that you're doing well."

I felt rather embarrassed in the face of these supposedly dear family members that I had absolutely no recollection of. They had evidently missed me, however, and I was moved by their affection. After approximately half an hour of conversation that flowed naturally after a while, we ended the call as Audrey was complaining of sleepiness.

John left his phone lying on the table and immediately picked Audrey up, carrying her into the room. As John delicately held Audrey in one arm, he patted her gently on the back with the other. It was the model image of fatherliness.

John ensured that Audrey was tucked into bed and turned off the lights before heading back into the living room.

"Can you drive?" John asked as he took a seat beside me. He'd picked his phone up and was jabbing at it.

"I don't know," I admitted, shaking my head. After I'd regained consciousness, Marcus had been the one sending me everywhere. Afterward, Ashton too had arranged for a chauffeur for me. I'd thus not had the chance yet to even come into contact with a

steering wheel. "I think I can try, though. Why don't you buy me a car?" I ventured.

John ignored my playful request. "That means you can't drive, then. You'll head downstairs on your own later. The chauffeur and the car are already waiting for you at the entrance of the hotel. I'll stay to accompany Audrey, so I won't be seeing you off."

"How did you know I wanted to leave?" I gaped at John in astonishment.

Without batting an eyelid, John replied smoothly, "I know you far better than you think. Go back and do what you have to do. Once you've wrapped up the loose ends, there won't be a need to look back and regret anything. Leave Ashton's kidnapping plans to me. I'm not fond of that fellow, but since you're set on a family reunion, I'll find a way to fulfill your wish. I'll use him as a servant at the most."

I could not help but find John's stoicism endearing. I was clearly very important to him that he was willing to put aside his immense hatred for Ashton to please me. At that moment, I knew then the full weight of what Scarlett meant to John.

It was past five in the evening when I exited the hotel. A gray Mercedes-Benz was the only car parked out in front. I approached it cautiously. As I went near, I could hear the sound of the doors unlock. Thus, I immediately opened the car door and slid into the passenger seat.

I was stunned to see that the chauffeur was a woman.

"Pleased to meet you, Ms. Stovall. I'm Millie. You have previously hired me to protect you and your children. After what happened, Mr. Stovall kept me in his service to await your return. You can ask me anything you like. There's no need to feel shy," she chirped.

Millie's straightforward explanation and heartiness comforted me. I immediately took a liking to her frank manner.

"I'll leave my safety in your capable hands then," I replied her warmly. Fastening my seatbelt, I instructed, "To the Fullers'."

Within the next second, Millie had revved the engines, and the car hurtled forward.

We arrived at the Fullers' villa in less than twenty minutes.

"We're here," Millie said matter-of-factly as she turned off the engine.

I took a deep breath. It was a while before I felt confident enough to face what lay ahead of me. I unbuckled the seatbelt rather hesitantly.

"Do you need me to go in with you?" Millie asked.

"There's no need," I asserted. "Ashton will be alarmed if I bring someone with me. Go back and look after Audrey."

I sounded more self-possessed than I was. Deep inside, I was trembling. I stepped out of the car and took a breath of fresh air. Millie's driving hadn't helped matters. The breakneck speed at which we'd flown through the streets had only served to increase the level of adrenaline in me. Consequently, my heart was still pumping madly.

I straightened myself out, then walked up to the entrance of the villa. As I crossed the threshold, however, I ran right into Ashton.

"Ms. Stovall?" Joseph, who was following behind, exclaimed in amazement.

Gregory had been dragging his feet listlessly beside Joseph. When he heard Joseph's yelp, he immediately perked up and dashed over to me.

"Mommy! I thought you didn't want me anymore. I want you to be my mommy forever! Don't leave me behind," Gregory bawled, clinging desolately to my leg.

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I quickly knelt down next to Gregory and pacified him, saying, "Silly boy, Mommy only left for a while. How could I have left you behind? Didn't we agree that we'd stick together?"

However, Gregory could not be so easily appeased. He frowned in deep thought. After a moment, his eyes lit up. Extending his tiny pinky towards me he claimed, "We didn't make a pinky promise last time, so it didn't count. Now we have to!"

I put on an unsmiling face and hooked my pinky with Gregory's. He cheered up considerably afterward.

Looking down at Gregory clad smartly in a tuxedo, I guessed that the three of them were heading out to dinner. In a friendly manner, I asked, "Are you going out to dinner tonight, Gregory?"

Before Gregory could reply, Ashton cut in with a low voice, "We're going to meet my parents. You have to come too."

We're going to meet the Hall family? I thought, amused. I guess today isn't a wasted trip after all.

I smiled cheerfully at Ashton, then replied, "Sure! Let me go back and change. Wait here for me."

"It's alright," Ashton commanded, halting me in my tracks. "You can come as you are. There's no need to be so formal."

Without another word, Ashton got into the van parked just outside the yard.

I shrugged and followed after him, holding tightly onto Gregory's hand. At least I've saved some time and trouble going back to change.

I was actually supremely interested to meet the Hall family. They must be a callous bunch who attempted to wipe out their own son and daughter-in-law without blinking.

We boarded the van. I sat in the back with Gregory while Ashton sat in the front. We seemed to have come to a mutual

understanding that the earlier matter with John would not be discussed.

Gregory was thrilled to see me and naturally chattered on endlessly, filling me in with all the news from school that I'd missed in my absence.

When the van was idling at a traffic light, I suddenly thought of Audrey. Experimentally, I asked, "Gregory, you don't really like to mix with the younger children at school, do you? Do you find them dull? If you have a younger sister who's very childish, would you dislike her?"

"Of course, I won't!" Gregory declared stoutly. "I'll stay with my sister always and protect her. I won't let anyone bully her!"

The firmness with which Gregory spoke made an amusing contrast with his still-babyish voice. A picture of Gregory and Audrey holding onto each other suddenly surfaced in my mind.

I laughed, then ruffled Gregory's hair. I looked at him fondly, commending, "You've really grown up into a fine young man, Gregory!"

Looking up, I saw Ashton sneakily watching us through the rearview mirror. However, Ashton looked away from the mirror the instant our eyes met, All that remained was the stiff, icy look on his face.

He issued me with another look of utter contempt that doubled up as a warning.

Ashton didn't seem to care that I had told Gregory about Audrey. It felt like he had full assurance that he would be able to acquire custody of both Audrey and Gregory.

Time flew by as I was thus occupied in thought. It seemed as if we'd arrived at the Hall residence within mere minutes.

Ashton led Gregory and me forward while holding onto Gregory's hand, I followed closely.

"Mr. Ashton, Mr. Gregory," the maids standing by both sides of the door chorused as we entered. The living room, however,

seemed to be completely still. I presumed that we had arrived earlier than we were expected.

Upon further inspection, however, I realized that I had jumped too quickly to conclusions.

The entire Hall family had already assembled, and they filled the living room. They'd spread themselves out on the sofas but remained oddly hushed. Some were flipping through the papers while others scrolled through their phones. No one exchanged a single word. A suffocating silence hung in the air.

At the sound of our incoming footsteps, Tiffany's head snapped up. The moment her gaze landed on me, she looked aggressive.

Ashton, however, stepped forward, placing himself squarely between Tiffany and me. Ashton's sturdy body formed a solid barricade that prevented further escalation of the tension that charged the air between us.

Tiffany sulked. She flung her phone away from her, crossing her arms in front of her chest in annoyance.

Ashton ignored her completely. He strode into the room with the two of us in tow, paying no attention to the various looks that were suddenly focused intently in our direction.

We'd barely taken a few steps into the room when Tiffany said incredulously, "Ashton, have you been too busy with work after firing me from the company? We're having a family dinner tonight. It's not the time for you to bring random strangers home."