

# In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 416

Michael was an introvert. He gripped his father's hand tightly as he stared at Summer and nodded. "Mhm. Thank you, Ms. Stovall!"

"Let's go, then!"

At home, Summer and Michael busied themselves with picking produce in the backyard while Colin left to purchase fish.

Meanwhile, I started washing vegetables in the kitchen.

For the past four years, I had made a habit of personally cooking for Summer so as to ensure she had a balanced diet. As a result, my cooking skills had improved greatly.

After I'd washed the vegetables, the two kids came stumbling into the kitchen, each carrying a small basket.

Michael's basket was filled to the brim—some of the vegetables inside threatening to spill over.

Summer's basket only had several miscellaneous vegetables. It looked like she had been walking behind Michael and carefully picking up anything that had actually fallen out of his basket.

"We're back, Mommy!" Summer proudly held her basket high up in the air, her face streaked with dirt.

I took the basket from Michael, hurriedly wiping away the sweat on his face. "You should share some with Summer next time. It's too heavy for you to carry yourself!"

The boy grinned, his eyes soft and full of affection as he looked at Summer. "She's too small to carry this!"

"That's right, Mommy! I asked Michael to help me carry these because I'm not strong enough!" Summer giggled. I couldn't help but wonder if she had learned this shamelessness from Jackson.

Furrowing my eyebrows, I scolded, "If you bully Michael like this again, I'll make you water all the vegetables in the backyard by yourself."

"I don't care. I won't be by myself, anyway." She pouted.

This little...

Michael had always rushed to help her whenever she was receiving punishment. It would seem that she had gotten used to his company, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Colin came back, having bought some carp fish and shrimp.

Summer picked up one of the shrimp and started chasing poor Michael around with it in the yard.

Taking the basket of produce from me, Colin said, "I'll wash these. The fish have been cleaned, so you can cook them straight away."

I nodded.

Soon, the two kids smelled the food and gathered around the stove, staring up at me as their stomachs grumbled.

"Go and set the table, you little wolves!" Colin ordered them, putting down the clean vegetables next to me.

Just like I'd expected, Michael went off to take out the plates and utensils while Summer didn't budge an inch.

Colin laughed, picking her up in his arms and setting her aside. "Be a good girl and take the fruits by the sink and place them on the dinner table. We'll start eating soon, I promise."

She nodded, whining in my direction, "Hurry up, Mommy! I'm hungry!"

Nodding, I plated up the dishes and Colin served them up.

A giggle escaped me when I spotted the kids were already waiting eagerly in their seats. "You guys go ahead. My vegetable stew's not done yet."

"We'll wait for you, Mommy!" Summer suggested, grinning in anticipation at me even though she was starving.

After dinner, Colin and Michael washed the dishes while Summer and I went to the yard to pick some fruits.

I had scattered lots of watermelon seeds in the garden last spring and bought several peach trees when I first moved to R Province. Now, the yard would bless us with an abundance of fresh fruits every year at the height of summer.

A basket in one arm, Summer picked up some peaches from the ground, asking, "Mommy, do you like Mr. Johnson?"

I cracked up with laughter, pinching her tiny nose. "What are you trying to say, sweetheart?"

She held her chin, deep in thought. "I was thinking if you could make Mr. Johnson my Daddy."

"Do you want a Daddy that badly?" I did a double-take.

Summer tilted her head, scrunching her face up in contemplation before solemnly saying, "Not really. But, I like Michael. If you got married to Mr. Johnson, then I can get married to Michael too."

"You can still get married to Michael without Mr. Johnson marrying your Mommy!" A deep, loud voice called out from behind us.

The both of us whipped around in surprise. Summer gasped and ran as fast as her short legs could take her. "Mr. Jackson!"

His arms opened wide for Summer to run into them, which she happily did. "If you really want a father, why don't you call me Daddy, Summer?" he suggested.

She was quiet for a moment before replying, "But my friend said that a Daddy is someone who sleeps on the same bed as Mommy."

She...

Jackson pursed his lips, glancing over at me. "Your daughter knows too much."

Guffawing, I held the basket in one arm and a watermelon in another as I walked towards him. "Why are you here? Didn't you say that you were busy?"

He let go of Summer, taking the basket and watermelon from me. "I figured that the fruits in your garden would be ripe by now, so I plan on staying over for the next few days to eat some. Is that okay?"

"Of course!"

Jackson had opened up a counseling clinic in J City, and things were going swimmingly for him these past few years.

He had come to visit us quite frequently when we first moved to R Province. However, those visits were reduced to only once per year due to how busy he was getting.

The sky was dark after we had fruits for dessert, and Summer insisted on going out to take a walk.

Not having much else to do, everyone subsequently tagged along and headed out.

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Both sides of the street were lined with rose bushes that were always in full bloom during this time of the year. Summer liked playing here, and she liked dragging Colin and Michael along here with her as well.

Every time she came here, she would ask for an ice cream cone, and Colin would buy one for her.

Colin exited a shop, handing one ice cream cone each to Summer and Michael before giving me one as well.

I chuckled. He's treating me like a child.

Summer carefully licked at her cone, lifting her head up to look at Colin. “Mr. Johnson, why do you always buy ice cream for Mommy too? Mommy says that only kids eat ice cream, and adults don’t.”

“Your Mommy is a kid, just like you,” joked Colin.

Summer glanced at Jackson in confusion, going on to ask, “Mr. Jackson is the same age as Mommy, so does that mean he’s a kid? Why didn’t you buy ice cream for Mr. Jackson?”

Jackson nearly spat his water out. “That’s because I’m a manly man. I’m not a kid, so I don’t eat these kinds of things. Your Mommy and I are different—no matter how old your Mommy gets, she will always be a child.”

Summer nodded, although it didn’t look like she understood a single thing he’d said.

As the sky grew darker and darker, the street lamps suddenly lit up. I couldn’t help but gasp at the sight. Nick and I had walked through a street that looked similar to this one in the past.

That street had also been filled with rose bushes, but this one didn’t have a night market, nor a barbecue stand.

“What are you thinking about?” Jackson nudged me, jolting me from my daze.

I realized that Summer and Michael had already run off a good distance away. Colin was following closely behind them.

I shook my head slowly in response to Jackson’s question.

His eyes darted between Colin and me, raising an eyebrow. “He’s quite alright—personality-wise and looks-wise. Other than being a little older, he’d be a good choice.”

His sudden comment took me aback, and I furrowed my eyebrows as I turned to him. “Huh?”

“Trying to find you a good partner!” He shrugged.

“I take it you’re not so busy with work after all,” I teased.

He sighed, saying casually, "I just think he's a good guy. He treats you well and has been helping to look after Summer these past few years. Besides, you're thirty years old. Now that you've moved on, you should start rebuilding your life and find someone so that you'll feel less lonely when Summer grows up."

I rolled my eyes and decided to ignore him, heading towards the kids.

"Don't roll your eyes at me. I'm being serious!" Jackson chased after me, ranting on, "Ashton is already planning on getting engaged. You should really start to think about your own future as well."

A chill ran down my spine, and I stiffened for the briefest moment. Taking a few seconds to process the new information, I glanced back at Jackson. "Engaged?"

He nodded. "With Rebecca. She is his responsibility, after all. Even if there's no love between them, he has to take responsibility for her, so getting married isn't that big of a deal. You, on the other hand, should honestly consider Colin."

I sighed, walking away. The night had turned darker than I last remembered.

That's right.

It's been four years. Ashton starting to live his own life shouldn't have come as a surprise.

We were now strangers to each other. I should be wishing him well.

Quietly finishing my ice cream under the dim glow of the street lamps, I suddenly felt like this street resembled my life's journey.

Summer was sound asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow at home. Colin had brought Michael home as well, and Jackson stayed up chatting with me for a while longer before retreating to his guest room.

In my bedroom, I hugged my hurting stomach for a long time, unable to move from the pain. Even after four years, I would still suffer from horrible cramps every time I got my period.

And to top it all off, I had also eaten ice cream today.

I'd thought that I could sleep off the pain, just like I used to, but I didn't expect to lose consciousness in the middle of the night.

When I came to, I was at the hospital. Jackson's arms were crossed as he glared at me. "Don't tell me you didn't know you're not supposed to eat ice cream while on your period."

I sighed weakly, licking my dry lips. "It doesn't hurt anymore."

He huffed, his eyes slightly swollen and red. "Summer was so scared that she burst into tears and refused to leave your side. I was in the next room. You could have called me or shouted out. Why did you endure the pain by yourself? Since when you started not telling others whenever you're hurting?"

He has a point.

Since when had I started to keep all my pain to myself?

"I'm fine. Don't worry about me," I chuckled lightly, shaking my head.

Sensing that I wasn't taking any of his words to heart, Jackson stormed out of the hospital ward, clearly pissed off.

Colin helped me with some of the hospitalization procedures, looking apologetic as he turned to me. "I'm really sorry. I should have noticed sooner!"

"I was craving a sweet treat, so it wasn't your fault," I reassured him. "Has Michael already gone off to school?"

"Yes, and so has Summer. Though, she's still very worried about you. I'll make a trip to the school later and tell her that you're doing better."

"Thank you." Summer and I were co-dependent on each other. I couldn't leave her, and she couldn't leave me.

"You're welcome." He smiled like he wasn't sure what to do with me. "You need to rest here for two days while I handle things at the hotel. You can pause your janitorial job for a while and focus on your new job. Hopefully, that'll take some of the burdens off of your shoulders."

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Afraid that Colin would think I was a broken record if I thanked him again, I just laughed self-consciously. "I'll leave that to you."

He set the hospitalization form down on the bedside table, sighing. "You shouldn't try to shoulder everything yourself."

I pursed my lips.

As it turned out, I was not in a serious condition. Jackson stayed accompanying me. There was someone to take care of Summer, and Colin would visit me sometimes.

I had been busy with work and taking care of Summer every day for the past four years. It felt strange to have a few days of free time with nothing to handle or manage.

Jackson looked at me as we were packing my things before getting discharged from the hospital. "The doctor says that you developed this illness as a result of giving birth. You better take good care of yourself from now on. You're only thirty years old, so don't end up looking like a hag by the time you turn forty."

I hummed, changing the topic. "Summer wants to eat fried chicken. Let's drop by the supermarket on the way home."

He rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Of course. That's your top priority."

I picked up my stuff and headed downstairs without another word.

Colin had kindly offered to drive us and was already waiting for us in the parking lot. I didn't have a good reason to refuse him, so I got in his car.

After buying chicken at the supermarket and sending Jackson and me home, he went back out to pick Summer and Michael up from school.

My days returned to their ordinary, mundane routine. I recalled how I used to dream about if, by some miracle, I could spend the rest of my life with Ashton.

Perhaps I was a more family-focused person. My ideal life was to take care of my children, learn new recipes, and make sure that my children and husband were healthy and happy.

But life doesn't always work out the way you want it to. I had let go of many things in the past four years. Yet, I always found myself thinking that maybe Ashton had his own grievances. Maybe he had his reasons for lying to me and hurting me.

Because I loved him too much, my hatred and anger towards him were poisoned with love. As time passed, those opposing emotions canceled each other out and dissolved into nothing. No matter what happened, we were now two separate people leading two separate lives.

Colin worked efficiently to secure me a spot in the office, but it was hard for me to get used to having a job that gave me so much free time.

As a result of that free time, I distracted myself by listening to some gossip and rumors that were going around the office. Apparently, someone in the hotel had committed suicide by jumping off a building because they were facing relationship troubles.

Some people in the office debated over the issue.

"I heard that the girl's parents are ministers from K City. I know that our hotel had no part in her death, but it still happened on our hotel grounds. I have a bad feeling about this."

"I know, right? We had put so much effort into helping the hotel recover, but now, it looks like we'll have to look for new jobs again."

"Ugh. I also heard that our parent company is super well-off and doesn't care about the profits our small hotel is making. Those snobbish higher-ups probably don't want to waste money on handling the situation. In fact, they might just shut down the hotel."

"That means, we're going to become unemployed... To think that I went through so much trouble to work here—where the pay is actually good and the environment is alright. I can't believe I'm losing my job because of this."

Some of the hotel receptionists stood near me and chatted as I subtly listened in on their conversation. They did have a point. R Province was a small city without any large corporations. Instead, it only had some factories and smaller companies.

This holiday hotel was already considered large compared to the other hotels in the city, with a better salary and working environment. If it shut down, I would have to look for a new job all over again.

It would be hard to find a job that paid even three thousand monthly. I couldn't help but sigh internally. It was just my luck that this would happen right before I was about to get this month's paycheck.

Colin walked in, furrowing his eyebrows as his stare swept over the gaggle of receptionists. "If you have time to stand around moping, I'd rather you use that time to think about the work you have done."

The young women jumped, instantly scattering.

Colin headed towards me, noticing that I was staring blankly at my computer screen. "What are you doing? It's nearly time to get off of work. Do you want to go pick up Summer and Michael together?"

I nodded on reflex before remembering the work I still had left. I frantically shook my head. "Please help me pick Summer up. I haven't finished my tasks yet."

Glancing at my computer screen that displayed an incomplete table, he laughed and walked away without another word.

The group of receptionists from before started whispering among themselves as soon as he stepped out the door, turning their focus to me.

Joyce stared me down with disdain. "Hey, Scarlett. How did you turn from a janitor into one of the most laidback workers at this hotel in charge of two positions overnight? What's your secret?"

Her tone sounded weirdly sharp and icy as she spoke. Someone else, adding fuel to the fire, chimed in, "Tell us, Scarlett. You seem so much prettier and wiser with experience compared to us. I'm sure you know some tips for sweet-talking people."

Joyce scoffed, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Sweet-talk? More like sleeping around! I heard that women turn into hungry cougars when they become thirty years old, and it looks like Mr. Johnson couldn't escape this old witch's clutches either! Her method of using sex to

benefit herself is much more convenient compared to our way of working hard day by day to get to where we are now!”

I looked up at them as they continuously spat out terms like “old witch” and “sleeping around.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What time will he arrive?” I inquired as I piled Summer and Michael’s plates with vegetables. The two children had identical preferences for food—both being meat-eaters

with a strong aversion to greens. Their picky appetite warranted force-feeding to ensure that they get their nutrients.

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

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

I had a good idea of how things worked.

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

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

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

I stood waiting at the entrance of the hotel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Please, allow me!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I frowned, loathing the unsolicited spotlight.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After saying my piece, I turned to leave.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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