

In Love, Never Say Never

Chapter 676

As Tessa almost lifted me off the seat, I pushed her away with all my might in desperation. She then stumbled and fell onto the ground, causing the air to fill with momentary awkwardness.

She looked at me in resentment. "What are you doing, Scarlett?"

"I'm sorry, Tessa. I didn't mean to," I said apologetically, equally taken aback.

Just then, Ashton and his group of friends were already making their way toward us.

Probably because Tessa was in his way, Ashton shot a quick glance at Joseph, who helped Tessa up from the ground.

Out of politeness, Ashton asked, "Miss, are you alright?"

Looks of grimace instantly disappeared from Tessa's face as she stood up and replied softly, "Thank you. Scarlett and I were just talking about you. She said you guys are pretty close."

I frowned. When have I said that?

There were glimmers in Ashton's eyes as they fell on me. His voice was low and reserved as he spoke, "Have you eaten?"

I nodded at the common pleasantries. The way the group of men who continued to fix their gazes at me, however, was making me uneasy again.

A middle-aged, plump man who stood behind Ashton seemed to have picked up some cues as he spoke eagerly, "Well, looks like you're a good friend of Mr. Fuller's. What's your name, Miss? You should join us for karaoke."

It seemed like he had mistaken me for someone who might have a thing for Ashton.

I smiled faintly while shaking my head. "That's okay. I actually got to go. You guys should go ahead without me."

As I was about to leave, Tessa grabbed onto me, scanned the few people, and said, "It's not every day that we bumped into someone we know. Since Mr. Watson has extended his invitation to us, it'll be rude for us to say no."

This is Derek Watson?

My brows furrowed a little as I studied the portly man.

It would seem that Ashton had come to A City for business indeed.

A self-satisfied grin appeared on the man's face upon hearing Tessa's flattery. It was one to indicate words well said.

Ashton looked at me with his brows slightly raised to indicate his disapproval of Derek's comment earlier.

After spending so many years together, I knew him too well. Before he could respond, I chimed in with Tessa, "Ah, it's Mr. Watson. Please forgive me. It's an honor to meet you."

Derek let out a loud chuckle. He was so pleased with himself as though nothing else matters.

He then extended his hand to pull me inside their private room. My instinct was to avoid his hand, but Tessa had walled up my only escape route.

My senses were overcome with disgusts; my whole being was against the idea of being led into a room by a gross, fleshy man.

As my fight or flight response was about to lean toward the latter, I was pulled into a familiar, strong arm.

Standing firmly next to me, Ashton said in his commanding voice, "Let's move."

Everyone was startled and Derek's hand was frozen awkwardly in the air before he quickly withdrew it and let out an uncomfortable smile. "Haha, Mr. Fuller is efficient as always. Let's go."

As we walked away, I could not help but notice half of my body was enclosed by Ashton, the sight was more than suggestive to any outsider.

I tried to rub my arm from Tessa's excessive force just now when Ashton's deep voice rang softly, "What's the matter?"

Shaking my head, I simply said, "It's nothing."

Tessa was walking next to Joseph. Her chilly vision landed on me and Ashton.

If I didn't know why Tessa changed her mind and decided to befriend me earlier. Now it was clear as day to me.

With someone like Ashton, even the most esteemed socialite will surrender herself in his charms, let alone a commoner like Tessa. Besides, in her mind, despite her mediocre look and stubby build, she possesses the highest of self-esteem, not unlike those characterized by classic narcissistic personality. In her feel-good world, it'd probably take someone like Ashton to qualify for her matching prerequisites.

Inside the private room, a few of them ordered some alcoholic drinks and started to loosen up.

Before long, a few escorts arrived to keep the men company.

Joseph was a married man and had always steered clear of such regards. Ashton, on the other hand, pulled me over to sit next to him.

There were now about four to five men, each having a good time singing and dancing with the young and beautiful ladies.

While Tessa tried to keep her cool in a corner, Joseph excused himself to get some fresh air outside.

As for Derek, as much as he seemed like one who was inclined to self-indulge, he was here for business. Therefore, after a while, he got some of the girls to keep topping Ashton's wine glass and whispered something into Tessa's ear.

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Tessa then walked up to me and asked me to sing with her.

I was no idiot; it was clearly a business maneuver on Derek's part to use alcohol and pretty ladies as a social lubricant to loosen Ashton up in order to help their subsequent business discussion.

I did not like singing, and Tessa's incessant pestering was starting to get under my skin.

I finally stood up and said, "It's late, we should head back to Nora and Armond."

Tessa was momentarily taken aback, but quickly replaced her expression with a smiling face. "There's no rush. Let's have more fun here before we go!"

She then poured me a glass of wine before she continued to persuade me to stay, "Scarlett, since we are now officially friends, we should drink for it!"

This woman is just too calculative to be a good candidate for either a friend or a colleague.

But since the wine glass was already pushed into my hand, it would be rather rude for me to decline.

Before the glass touched my lips, a hand flashed before my eyes and took over the glass.

When I turned around, Ashton had already downed the glass of wine for me.

Before I snapped out of my bewilderment, Tessa said alluringly, “Mr. Fuller, are you trying to be a hero to the damsel in distress?”

The woman then looked like she tried but failed to mimic a seductive laugh. The result of which was somewhat disturbing, because, rather than a Cinderella, she now resembled a smiling Cruella.

“Mr. Fuller, I have known Scarlett a long time, but I have no idea she knows someone as charming as you. It’s such a pleasure meeting you today. Let’s keep in touch and maybe we can hang out sometime. Cheers to a new friendship!” It was the classic playbook for “How to get that guy”.

Ashton looked at me with his eyes darkened a little. I wasn’t sure what was in his mind when he took over a drink from Tessa and clinked glass with her. “Since you’re Scarlett’s friend, it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Thank you for looking after Scarlett.”

Tessa was suddenly star-struck, for this seemed to be the first time Ashton had addressed her directly. “Ah, don’t mention it. Scarlett and I had been through life and death together, we’re friends for life now.”

Upon hearing this, Ashton was a little startled when he shifted his gaze at me quizzically. "Life and death?"

Biting my lips, I wished Tessa would just shut her big mouth.

Tessa, on the other hand, felt encouraged that Ashton seemed to be interested in what she said and happily continued, "That's right! We were brought to Venria not long ago and had been through hell, almost losing our lives. We barely managed to escape unscathed from Venria and came back to the country in one piece. So, that's how Scarlett and I have become friends."

Ashton's eyes grew increasingly inexplicable by the second. He darted a glance at Joseph who had just walked into the room.

While I still wondered what that was about, Joseph sat down next to Tessa and they started chatting away. Before long, they had exchanged phone numbers and added each other on WhatsApp.

That's weird, I thought Joseph hates to social?

Ashton wrapped his arm around me, without caring so much about those around us. "Did you hide that from me because you didn't want me to worry?" he asked in a lowered voice.

Pursing my lips, I replied flatly, "No."

His voice had assumed a resolute tone when he spoke smilingly in my ear next moment, "I don't know the meaning of freedom, so I will not let you go. Since you refuse to walk toward me, I'll walk toward you."

The man's profession had caused a sudden warm stream to flash across my heart. To conceal my emotions, I lowered my gaze and gulped down another drink.

"If you wish to torture me, you may continue so," I said while attempting to sound calm and collected.

His arm tightened around me. "Do you have to be like this?" his voice was croaky.

I pursed my lips and downed a few more drinks.

In the meantime, Tessa had attempted a few times to strike up a conversation with Ashton, but each time, her attempt was blocked by Joseph.

Finally, feeling fed up, she stood up and looked at me. "Scarlett, I think it's time to go back. Nora might be looking for us now."

I nodded, wishing she had said that a long while ago.

Before I could stand up though, Ashton's arm pressed against my shoulder as he turned to Joseph and ordered, "Send Ms. Dixon back."

An annoyance crept up Tessa's face as she spoke, "Mr. Fuller, Scarlett, and I came together. I think it only makes sense that she leaves with me."

"That's not necessary. I'll send her back later."

“I don’t think that’s very appropriate, Mr. Fuller. Scarlett is a married woman, I’m sure her husband will be worried if she’s back late. Please don’t make this difficult for me.”

Tessa’s rapid revelation of my private life had successfully attracted the gazes of a few people who had paid no attention to me. Everyone was now holding their breaths to see how things were going to pan out.

Ashton smiled playfully as his vision fell on me. “That’s good. Keep it up”

What the...

Seeing that Ashton was unfazed by her presumably new information, Tessa turned to me and smiled knowingly. “So, Mr. Fuller. Does this mean you’re already aware that Scarlett is married?”

“Hmm.” The man nodded. “Ms. Dixon, please get going.”

Upon hearing the ambiguous reply from Ashton, a menacing smile spread across Tessa’s face.

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“Mr. Fuller, I didn’t know you were into young married ladies!” she joked.

Then she turned to look at me. “Scarlett, we should get going. If Nora and the others know about you and Mr. Fuller, Mr. Murphy is bound to find out. We wouldn’t want that to happen, would we!”

I felt uncomfortable at her words, and I stared at her with a frown. “Do you always speak so recklessly?”

“Y-You...” This seemed to piss her off, though she appeared to hold back her temper to save face.

I was planning to leave anyway, and I tried to pry Ashton’s arm from my waist. “It’s late. I should get going!”

Instead of loosening his arms, he tightened his hold on me with a scowl on his face. “Mr. Murphy?”

We were in a nightclub after all. Tessa’s words also did nothing to help my predicament. I could feel everyone’s stares boring into me.

I felt uneasy about the whole situation. I don’t want people to think of me as some married whore who goes around seducing other men! That’s just sick!

Suddenly I blurted in a fit of anger, “Ashton, what the heck do you want?”

I guess my voice had been louder than I’d expected. Even those who’d just been glancing at us from time to time were full-on staring at our exchange now.

Using all my strength, I tried to get up despite his unyielding hold. At most, I’ll just fall while trying.

He seemed to anticipate my movement and stood up with me.

He looked at the others and announced, "Thank you for hosting me today. It's late, and I should get going."

Derek appeared anxious since they hadn't reached an agreement on the issues they had meant to discuss. He rushed forward to stop Ashton from leaving. With a brown-nosing smile on his face, he said, "Mr. Fuller, you've only been here for a while. You haven't even enjoyed any of the drinks yet! Why don't you stay and have a bit of fun before you leave?"

Ashton had an annoying habit. Even if he knew from the start that he didn't want to work with someone, he would bring the person on a merry goose chase before telling them his decision.

At that moment, he looked at Derek with a warm smile on his face. "We can always get drinks again some other day. It's rather late today and seeing as we're not young men anymore, we should catch up on some rest and take better care of our health."

Derek's gaze landed on me at his words, and he shot a loaded smile at Ashton. "Of course, Mr. Fuller. We do need to get some more rest and take better care of ourselves."

He continued, "Mr. Fuller, where are you staying? I can arrange a driver for you."

Ashton raised his brows and replied, "No need. Please enjoy your drinks!"

He dragged me out of the room with him, calls of polite farewells following in our wake. Tessa left the room with us, and she urged me several times to leave with her.

I wanted to go back with her, but I couldn't escape from Ashton's grip of steel.

I pinched his waist hard in a fit of anger. He seemed utterly unaffected by my actions and merely lowered his head to give me a patronizing smile.

When we reached the pool hall, Ashton turned around to address Joseph, "Please send Ms. Dixon home."

Joseph nodded wordlessly.

Tessa started fretting when she saw Ashton dragging me with him. She blocked his path and confronted him. "Mr. Fuller, Scarlett came here with me. I don't think it would be appropriate for her to follow you home."

Ashton arched a brow and replied sardonically, "I don't think there's anything wrong if my wife goes home with me, is there?"

Stunned, she paused for a moment before asking, "Your wife?"

Ashton just stared at her silently.

Just then, Joseph interrupted the conversation. "Ms. Dixon, where do you stay? I'll send you back."

Ashton had never been a patient man, and he began pulling me away with him.

If I go with him now, our lives will become irrevocably tangled once more.

As these thoughts crossed my mind, I couldn't help but look back toward Tessa. I called out, "We're just acquaintances; I'm not really his wife."

This caused Ashton to furrow his brows. His grip on my waist tightened further as he turned his searching gaze on me. "Just acquaintances?"

I nodded. I felt a bit disconcerted, and I chalked it up to the alcohol I had drunk earlier.

Tessa seemed to let out a breath of relief when she heard me. She said to Ashton, "Mr. Fuller, you won't enjoy yourself with an unwilling woman. Plus, you don't know Scarlett that well, and it's kind of inappropriate to be together at such a late hour. You can always get to know her better first before deciding if you want to hook up with her."

An unpleasant feeling rose in my chest when I heard her little speech. Is she really helping me, or is she just picking on my faults in front of Ashton?

I couldn't discern her true purpose, but I knew that I couldn't let myself go back with Ashton.

I used all my might to pry Ashton's arm away.

Utterly exasperated, I glared at him. "Ashton, y-you..."

"You really think I'll let you go?"

I replied fiercely, "I'll sue you for kidnapping!"

“Oh, I wasn’t aware that bringing one’s missing wife home is counted as kidnapping.”

Dumbfounded, I stared mutely at him. My head continued to spin. It must be the drinks; after all, I haven’t had alcohol in a long time. That must be why I’m feeling so woozy now.

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Ashton continued dragging me with him. Tessa tried to chase after us, but Joseph blocked her.

I was kind of a lazy person by nature. As he half-carried me to his car, the thought of just giving in and following him began to take hold of my mind.

My thoughts petered out for a while as he settled me in his car. Soon, I started feeling uncomfortable.

I leaned heavily into the car seat and shut my eyes, falling into a hazy sleep.

The sound of my phone ringing reached my ears, and I frowned involuntarily. As I patted around weakly for my phone, I heard Ashton speaking to someone. “She’s drunk, and she is asleep.”

Groggily, I opened my eyes. I saw him talking to someone on my phone as he drove with one hand on the steering wheel, his eyes focusing on the road before him.

I made a face at him. How can you just answer someone's phone without asking for their permission? He mumbled an acknowledgment and hung up a moment later.

He placed my phone beside me and seemed to realize that I was awake. Surprised, he asked gently, "Are you feeling very uncomfortable?"

I shook my head. I was a bit groggy, and my limbs felt like they were made of jelly, but I was still conscious.

"Where are you taking me?" Looking out the window, I could tell that we were still in A City. He doesn't have a house in A City, so he's probably going to a hotel.

He raised his brows and said, "If you're uncomfortable, just close your eyes and rest for a bit."

I pouted, just as thoughts of the early days of our marriage flooded my brain. I couldn't help but laugh when I recalled how stubborn and dumb I'd been back then. It had gotten me into a lot of funny situations.

He frowned slightly and looked at me. "What are you laughing about?"

"When I first graduated from university, I'd planned to bring my Grandma with me to R province. I didn't have any grand plans about what to do. I thought that maybe I'd just return to R Province. Spend some time with Grandma in the yard gardening, and get a stable nine-to-five job in town. I'd be happy enough with that."

I paused and looked at him out of the corner of my eye. I burst into a fit of self-deprecating laughter as I continued, "I never thought that my Grandma would beg your Grandpa to take me in as your wife. Now it seems like our lives are destined to be

entangled together. At first, I thought I'd hit the jackpot, though I couldn't help but feel that I would never match up to you. That's why I asked Grandpa to let me work at Fuller Corporation. Even a position as lowly as a shop assistant was good enough for me. I believed that as long as I worked hard enough, I'd be a fitting partner for you one day. When I first joined the company, I got dragged by my supervisor to entertain some guests. He said it was my contribution to the company on account of my low rank. I didn't want to go at first, but then I thought I would have taken forever to reach a position close enough to you if I rejected him. My tolerance was horrible back then, but I kept forcing myself to drink with those old hats that I barely knew. I was basically chugging drink after drink mindlessly."

He reached over to hold my hand, though I pulled it out of his grasp and let out a resigned laugh. "Actually, I didn't feel like I was suffering back then. Not even now when I think back to the incident. I thought that the experience was good in the sense that I could work hard and prove myself in my youth, so I don't regret it one bit. If I'd stayed at home like a trophy wife, I don't think I would ever know how it felt like to slowly get to the Director position or the sense of accomplishment that came with it."

In contrast, I seemed to be deteriorating over the past few years. I've never felt more like myself than during those years of building my career.

I turned my head and looked out the car windows. I felt overwhelmed with a sense of failure. I don't know why I insisted on leaving when I knew that Ashton wouldn't let me go.

It seemed that I'd been struck with an epiphany. When I first met Rachel, I was impressed with her credentials. It's because she's a spitting image of the old me who fought hard for her career and romance.

But living a sheltered life under Ashton had gradually turned me into someone like Rebecca. Ashton had taken such good care of her that her world only revolved around Ashton and no one else.

I upped and left K City because I was worried that I would end up like her. I came to A City in search of the old me. Even if I couldn't find her anymore, I could at least live life on my own terms and become the person I wanted to be.

But alas, life is unpredictable. I didn't think I'd end up in Venria and almost lose my life. Despite so, I don't have to live in a gilded cage under Ashton's care or rely on him to chase my dreams. I can still get there myself. I can still live the life that I've always dreamed of.

The car came to a stop before a hotel. Ashton got out and came to the front passenger side. He lifted me straight out of his car.

Everything happened so quickly that I could barely react. I found myself being carried into the hotel.

"Ashton, what are you doing?" I asked indignantly, trying to push away from him. Unfortunately, the alcohol had made my limbs weak and my head dizzy, and my weak shove did little to deter him.

He carried me into the elevator and had me up against the walls before the doors had closed completely. He caged me in with his arms and cupped my face, desire burning in his eyes. "Don't hide from me, and don't say no to me!"

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I froze in shock, taken aback by his behavior. Just as I thought of lifting my arms to push him away, he'd caged me in against the walls of the elevator.

Luckily there's no one else in the elevator, or we'll all be in an awkward situation.

His closeness suffocated me, and I felt myself relaxing into his arms.

He swept me off my feet as the elevator doors opened, and he carried me straight to his room.

He switched on the lights in the hallway as he sat me down on the floor, pressing his body into mine. His gaze bored into mine as he said, "I'm not letting you go again."

His words seemed to be directed at both himself and me.

I opened my mouth and replied breathily, "Ashton, I—"

"Shush, I don't want to hear a single word!" He placed a finger on my lips.

I scrunched my lips and frowned at him. "Ashton, you jerk!"

Silently, he lifted me and strode towards the huge bed in the room.

He loomed over me on the bed. I turned my head away to avoid his gaze.

He turned my head back to face him. Staring intently at me, he sneered, "Trying to hide somewhere?"

I glowered at him since I couldn't turn my head away. "What exactly is happening right now? Are you planning to sleep with me before we go our separate ways? Or what else do you have planned?"

His voice hardened as he replied, "Go our separate ways?"

I raised my brows at him and said defiantly, "Or what? I told you before that I didn't love you, yet here you are forcing me to stay, so isn't that exactly what you want? I mean, that's usually what happens anyway when people pick up chicks at clubs, right?"

He scoffed and tightened his grip on me. "You seem to know a lot about these things, don't you?"

I pursed my lips and refused to meet his stare. "I can't help if I hear about it from the others."

I seemed to have pushed him too far as he suddenly got up, taking a deep breath to calm himself down. He headed straight for the bathroom without a single word.

I could only stare after him, perplexed at his behavior. I didn't know what to do next.

I sat on the bed absent-mindedly. I felt overwhelmed with exhaustion, though it was of an emotional nature. It always seems like I'm trying to run away, like some headless chicken running around in circles because I don't even know what I really want.

Just then, I received a phone call from Nora. Her booming voice came through the receiver. "Scarlett, did you fall into the toilet bowl or something? How could you just disappear after a brief trip to the restroom?"

Her loud voice made my headache worse, and I moved the phone further away from my ear. I replied a while later, "I'm already home. Something cropped up so I decided to leave earlier. Sorry, I forgot to let you all know."

Nora was incredulous as she asked, "You went home? With whom? Aren't you living with Mr. Murphy? If you left without him, who are you with now?"

I... Ugh! What a mess!

I paused for a moment to come up with a suitable excuse. "I bumped into a friend of mine from K City. Oh right, are you all still in the private room?"

"Girl, look at the time. Why would we still be there? Plus, it's hard to last the night at my age. Oh right, I just wanted to let you know that Mr. Murphy's pretty drunk tonight. Take care of yourself, and make sure you lock your doors and windows."

Stunned, I asked, "Did you ply him with drinks?" She must be trying to make a move on him.

She cackled wickedly. "I wasn't planning to get him drunk at first. But then, how often does a rich, handsome man drop in one's lap, am I right? If I missed this chance, I wouldn't have anything to boast about to my kid when I'm married to some mediocre man in the future. If I could bag myself a relationship with someone like that, that'd make for some great storytelling!"

The gears in my brain appeared to be jammed when faced with her unusual thought process. How does your brain come up with these things?

I couldn't help but comment, "If you need my help, just let me know. Who knows, maybe I can be your wing-woman. You can always drop by and pretend you're visiting me or something."

I heard her booming laughter. She sounded ecstatic like she was already imagining her glorious future.

She asked abruptly, "How about I drop by for a visit tomorrow?"

"No!" I blurted out before continuing awkwardly, "I'm busy tomorrow, so I can't entertain you."

She clicked her tongue at me. "What, you need to entertain that friend of yours from K City?"

Erm.

"Yep! I guess you could put it that way."

"Hmph! Ditching your friends for a man!"

I heard some movement behind me and hurried to end the call. "Nora, let's talk tomorrow. It's late, and we should get some sleep."

"Hey, why are you in a rush to end the call? I still—"

I hung up before she could finish her sentence.

The doors to the bathroom opened, and I turned around. Sitting cross-legged on the bed, I stared at the man who walked out with a towel slung on his waist.

We seemed to stare at each other for a beat before he arched his brows and asked, "Aren't you leaving?"

Me? He wants me to leave?

He smiled devilishly at my silence. "Do you have something to say to me?" he asked.

I pursed my lips and hopped off the bed. "Nope, it's getting late. I'm heading off now."