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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1461

“Oh, I see. By the way, this is my boyfriend, Joan. Larry is very amiable, so there’s no need to be shy with him.” Gabriella took Larry’s hand with a warm smile on her face.

She’s his girlfriend? Ah well, that makes sense. Only a beautiful and kind woman with a good family background like Gabriella is worthy of an outstanding man like him, Joan mused. At that thought, a bitter smile tugged at her lips.

“Thank you, Gabriella. But I’m about done discussing business with Mr. Norton, so I won’t disturb the two of you. We’ll talk another day. Please excuse me.” Instead of feeling thrilled to bump into her best friend during college, she was driven by guilt to leave as soon as possible.

“Mr. Norton, this document contains the specifics of our collaboration this time, so I’ll leave it here for your perusal. If you have any opinions or suggestions, feel free to voice them out. Someone from our company will contact you further.” Her sense of responsibility to the company overshadowed her conflicted emotions at present, so Joan steeled herself and extended the contract in her hand to Larry.

However, Larry didn’t move to take the contract. He merely stared at her coldly. As he looked at the woman who had once left him ruthlessly despite his fervent pleas, the emotions brewing within him were no less complicated than hers.

I should hate her, so why do I feel inexplicably distressed at the sight of her vulnerable expression? No! Why should I help her when she was the one who abandoned me? As that thought occurred to him, a white-hot rush of fury abruptly surged within him.

Snatching the contract from her, he threw it onto the table without even sparing it a single glance.

“I never expected you to be the person in charge of the project this time. It seems that your company’s credibility and integrity are questionable, so I still need to look into it further.” Sneering, he declared, “You may leave now.”

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His rejection was clear as day, making it known in uncertain terms that he didn't want to discuss business with her. Joan wanted to leave posthaste, so she nodded and replied, "Sure. Someone else will contact you soon, so please excuse me."

Then, she glanced at Gabriella at the side before spinning on her heels and left.

Gabriella was just about to say something when she glimpsed Larry's forbidding expression. All at once, she tactfully zipped her mouth.

Meanwhile, Larry's hands clenched and loosened intermittently as he stared at Joan's forlorn back. As a wave of irritation assailed him, he slammed his fist against the table hard before he stalked out of the office.

Gabriella, on the other hand, took note of it all.

"Joan Watts, I wonder what's your story with Larry Norton," she muttered with a contemplative gleam in her eyes.

After leaving Norton Corporation, desolation engulfed Joan. She had never expected to meet Larry again and had buried her abiding love for him in the deepest depths of her memories. Nevertheless, fate was a fickle b*tch. They met each other once again in an unexpected manner, and he already had a girlfriend of his own.

Her mind brought her back to the past, and she recalled the days when they got acquainted, fell in love, and dated. However much we loved each other, the depth of their love determined the severity of their hurt.

Back when they were both madly in love to the point of no return, she was informed during a medical checkup that she had a tumor in her brain, and it was already at the advanced stage.

That news was undoubtedly a severe blow to Joan who was in the prime of her life. The doctor told her that she needed to go abroad for treatment immediately, and the possibility of recovery was less than ten percent. Worse still, she might go blind anytime because the tumor was putting pressure on her central nervous system.

That very same day, her parents helped her to defer her studies. But the most agonizing aspect for her was having to face Larry who loved her deeply.

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To save him the anguish if anything happened to her, she chose to break up with him. And for that, she made up an excuse that she no longer loved him and had fallen in love with someone else instead. Larry begged her fervently, hoping that she would change her mind. Despite that, Joan didn't tell him the truth although she was grief-stricken herself. On the contrary, she further provoked him with words in hopes that he would forget about her sooner.

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The next day, Joan left without leaving a single word to Larry. And from then on, there was no news of her. Heartbroken, Larry's personality underwent a drastic change. He then went abroad to study. When he returned to the country, he inherited Norton Corporation and became the company's president.

Initially, they thought that their lives would be like two parallel lines without ever intersecting again after breaking up, but destiny had brought them together once more.

When Joan subsequently returned to the office in a daze, she notified another staff member to contact Norton Corporation. She then tried her best to forget everything that had happened that day, but his image and the wonderful memories of the past kept playing in her mind on a loop no matter how much she tried shaking them off.

At the end of the day, I still can't forget him. But alas, he's no longer mine.

Meanwhile, Larry sat in the chair in his office with his hands clasped against his forehead as he thought about everything that had happened earlier.

Similarly, his emotions were a chaotic mess. After that woman left me, I once spent my days in a drunken stupor and led a licentious life. I thought I'd forgotten about her entirely, but I only realize that I merely buried her in the deepest part of my heart. Once I came into

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contact with her, our memories burst forth like water rushing out of a dam, rendering me unable to resent her or be angry at her anymore.

Having struggled for a long while, he picked up his phone and rang up Opulent Designs.

“Hello, this is Larry Norton here. Tell Joan Watts to come to my office tomorrow. Otherwise, don’t even dream of getting the contract from me.” After hanging up the phone, the corners of his mouth lifted a fraction. “Hmph! I’ll make your life a living hell, Joan Watts!”

“What? Larry... no, I mean, Mr. Norton asked me to go to his office to collect the contract? W-Why me?” Joan’s eyes almost popped out of the sockets when she learned of that. After confirming it with the other person multiple times, she finally accepted it as the truth.

She had no desire to face Larry, but she was left with no other choice since it was the first huge project for the company and would yield long-term benefits to the development in the future. As one of the staff, she had no reason to decline.

“I’m just going over to discuss the collaboration, so don’t think about anything else, much less mention anything irrelevant!” After convincing herself for a long time, she finally mustered up her courage to go over to Norton Corporation once more.

When she again returned to Norton Corporation, she felt as though she was standing at the gates of hell.

Well, there’s no other choice but to face it head-on! Firming her resolve, she strode in as though she was going to her death.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Come in.”

Joan’s heart jolted, but it was already too late to make an escape when she was standing right outside his door. At that thought, she pushed open the door and walked in.

“M-Mr. Norton, I’m here to collect the contract,” Joan murmured with her head hung low.

“Come closer. Are you going to collect the contract from the door?” Larry’s voice was as chilly as ever.

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Upon hearing that, Joan gingerly moved forward.

“Speak!” Larry’s voice that brooked no argument rang out.

At that, Joan swallowed as his oppressive aura struck fear into her. “I’m here to collect the contract from you. If you have any suggestions, feel free to voice them out to me.”

“Hmph! Here’s the contract. I’ve included my suggestions for your proposal and the aspects that have to be further improved.” Pausing for a moment, Larry then continued, “And most importantly, everything I mentioned there is to be completed by you alone. Remember, you’re to do everything by yourself.”

Joan nodded dazedly in response. But after glancing through the contents of the contract, she questioned skeptically, “Did you mean that I’m to complete all the work here by myself?”

“Is there a problem?” Larry’s voice was threaded with an obvious hint of impatience.

“No.” How would I dare to say otherwise when the entire company’s fate is resting my shoulders alone?

“You must complete everything in a week. Any problems with that?”

“No problem.” Joan was on the verge of tears, but still, she gritted her teeth and agreed to his demand.

“You may leave now,” Larry sneered after casting her a glance.

“That’s all?” Joan was a tad surprised since she felt that he would never let her off easily. Yet, I can now leave after just a few words?

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“Are you deaf? If you have a problem with it, put down the contract and get lost!” Larry roared, livid. Hah! This woman is still as stupid as ever!

“Yes, yes, I understood. Goodbye, Mr. Norton,” Joan hastily replied as she trembled in terror. “Please excuse me, Mr. Norton. I look forward to working with you.”

Without waiting for him to answer, she bolted out of the office like the hounds of hell were nipping at her heels.

“This is just the first step. I want to get back everything you owe me. I look forward to working with you as well,” Larry mumbled as he watched her leave. Nevertheless, even he himself didn’t realize that his attitude had long since changed.

“Phew! I’m finally out of there!” Joan breathed in deeply, for every single second she was in his office was torture to her.

But at the thought of her conversation with him earlier, her lips that had just curved upward turned down again.

Such a massive amount of work will require at least two people to complete in a week, so if I’m doing it alone...

Despite her misgivings, she could only suffer in silence. Without fretting over it anymore, she instantly went back to the office and started on her insane workload.

Every day, she worked overtime until late at night. Then, she woke up early the next morning and rushed back to the office. Without her having realized it, three days had passed.

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Throughout the three days, she merely buried herself in work. While it was tiring, it was a blessing for her since she could temporarily put the matter of Larry at the back of her mind.

While Joan was swamped with work, Larry was conversely very much agitated. Not all company matters required his personal attention, and he could also easily resolve matters involving major decision-making with his outstanding capabilities, so he had quite some time on his hands.

Whenever he was free, Joan's image always appeared in his mind. Ever since she left, he decided to close his heart off to everyone. After all, it was only when one felt nothing that one wouldn't get hurt.

Tons of beautiful women flocked to him due to his imminent background and handsome outlook, yet he wasn't at all interested in any of them. Even when it came to Gabriella, it was only because of his business dealings with the Ward family and her insistent demand to work at Norton Corporation did he agree to take her in.

He tried his best to regard Joan as a mere business partner, but even after giving it his all, he discovered that he was merely lying to himself. The truth was, he still loved her despite hating her.

Joan Watts, you still owe me an explanation! At that thought occurred to him, he no longer hesitated but instantly drove over to Joan's company.

When the limited-edition Lamborghini gradually came to a stop in front of Opulent Designs, it attracted the attention of some passersby and staff members. All of them were curious to know which tycoon was the owner of the car.

As the car door swung open, a shining leather shoe extended out of the car, followed by a tall man in a suit. He had a handsome and captivating countenance, coupled with a pair of intelligent and profound-looking eyes. It was none other than Larry.

"Wow! He's so handsome!" Some ladies had long since started gawking by the roadside.

"And he's driving such a luxurious car despite his young age! Who is he?"

"Don't you know him? That's Larry Norton, the new president of Norton Corporation!"

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Larry was very much accustomed to the commotion he had created, so he didn't tarry at all. Instead, he strode into the building.

His arrival had the entire company descending into chaos. In no time, Joan's cousin, who was also the owner of the company, personally came over to greet him.

After exchanging some pleasantries, Larry asked for directions to Joan's office and headed there right away.

At that exact moment, Joan was taking a nap.

Exhausted physically and mentally from the deluge of work for several days in succession, she was so tired that she dozed off. Larry sauntered in without knocking on the door. When he spotted Joan who had fallen asleep while sprawled over the table, his heart clenched abruptly. Unbidden, he stretched out a hand to touch her face.

Coincidentally, Joan jolted awake at that precise moment. As their gazes locked, she jumped to her feet.

"Why are you here, Mr. Norton? I wasn't sleeping!" In the next moment, she hurriedly clapped a hand over her mouth upon realizing that she had misspoken.

Surprisingly, Larry didn't sink his teeth into her remark. Instead, he slowly retracted his hand that was suspended in midair and awkwardly rubbed his nose. "I just want to take a look at your revised proposal."

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Larry feigned calmness.

"Sure. Here you go." Joan swiftly handed him the proposal.

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"What's with this crappy proposal? This won't do! Draw up a new one!" Larry naturally didn't forget his intention in coming to her office.

"But why? I think it's pretty good." Bafflement inundated Joan.

"Is the decision in your hands or mine? Of course, you can opt not to change it..."

"I'll do it, I'll change it," Joan interrupted him, knowing that the matter was in her control.

"There's no need to do it now. I'm thirsty, so get me a cup of coffee," Larry ordered.

"I'll have someone make a cup of coffee for you."

"You do it!"

Joan could tell that Larry was deliberately making things difficult for her, but she didn't mind it. I owe him too much, so it'll assuage my guilt if I even get to repay him the slightest bit.

"Here's your coffee, Mr. Norton." Lacking the guts to look at him, she dipped her head.

Larry took the coffee and placed it on the table. Then, he stared at her. At that moment, it was as though time had come to a standstill.

After a long moment, he demanded, "Lift your head up, Joan Watts. I've got a question for you."

Upon hearing that, Joan shook slightly. Has this moment finally arrived despite me hoping otherwise? But what should I do?

She raised her head and met his deep and conflicted gaze.

"You still owe me an explanation. Why did you leave me back then?" Larry's voice carried a weight that overwhelmed her.

However, Joan remained silent.

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“Why? Why did you leave? Do you know how much your actions hurt me?” Larry’s voice was no longer calm. “Do you have any idea how I suffered back then?”

Gradually, Joan’s eyes turned red-rimmed, and tears shimmered within them. “I know I have wronged you, but we can never go back to how things once were.”

She tried her utmost best to suppress the urge to wail aloud. I love him! I love him so much, but he already has a girlfriend of his own now, and she’s my best friend to boot! In that case, how could I tell him the truth and make us both miserable?

At the sight of the tears swimming in her eyes, Larry felt as though someone had stabbed him in the heart. “So, you’re still unwilling to tell me the truth? Or was it truly because you had fallen in love with someone else back then?”

In the end, Joan’s tears still escaped her eyes and streamed down her face like a faucet. “If you think so, then just continue to believe in that. I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.”

At the end of the day, she still chose to sacrifice the love she could have attained. Even now, she was still willing to do anything for him.

Seemingly grasping the sorrow and despair in her eyes, Larry felt that he shouldn’t continue coercing her. Perhaps she truly had her own reasons in doing that.

“You don’t need to apologize. Neither of us owes the other anything, for I did everything for you willingly.”

He reverted to his calm and unruffled state once again. He couldn’t bear to see her in distress even if they could no longer go back to how things once were.

“There’s no need to change the proposal anymore. You may continue your work. I’ll leave now.” After saying that, he left without a backward glance. He didn’t dare tarry for even a single second, afraid that he would relent and hug her tightly upon seeing her sad and helpless expression.

He has left, so he has probably given up on me, huh? I’ve pushed him away again, just like how I ruthlessly left him back then!

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Joan's love for him remained in her blood, and the vivid memories consumed her time and again. As she crouched on the ground in agony, tears flowed soundlessly.

Since I've made my choice, I shouldn't regret it anymore!

She chose to forget the past. Her present self merely wanted to complete the business deal smoothly and she would sever all ties with him after that.

I don't want to be hounded by the past anymore. I only want to live my life peacefully, and at the same time, wish him happiness!

It was good to have a resolution, but Larry didn't give her such an opportunity.

Presently, it was already the fourth time he came to Opulent Designs, and the staff members had already gotten used to his presence from their initial surprise and awe.

Starting from his third visit, the owner of Opulent Designs no longer came out to greet him personally. Good Lord, his visits are so frequent that I truly can't be bothered to welcome him every single day!

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He made his way to Joan's office casually, Larry pushed opened the door and parked his butt on a chair before staring at the woman who had her head buried in her work.

"You're here, Mr. Norton?" Joan greeted without even lifting her head as though she had known about his arrival in advance.

"Yeah. Anyhow, just carry on with your work. I'm just here to check on your progress," Larry answered. He was still a tad perturbed by her addressing him as Mr. Norton, but he couldn't do anything about that.

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“Okay, please make yourself at home, then. I’ll entertain you in a moment.” Joan maintained a businesslike attitude.

Sensing the distance in her tone, a wave of irritation assailed Larry. He took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. That was a bad habit he had developed after she left, and it had now become an addiction.

At the sight of him smoking, a flash of desolation flittered across Joan’s eyes. He never smoked in the past, so it might be because of me as well. At the thought of that, her guilt multiplied.

Larry was sitting very close to her, so Joan inevitably inhaled the lingering cigarette smoke. She had an inherent dislike of cigarette smoke, so despite having tried her best to suppress her distaste, a few light coughs still escaped her in the end.

Upon hearing her coughing, Larry’s brows furrowed. All of a sudden, he remembered that she loathed the reek of cigarette smoke in the past. After hesitating for a long while, he snubbed out the cigarette in his hand and threw it into the trash can at the side.

“I’m hungry, Joan Watts. Accompany me to lunch.” Larry sounded as though he was issuing an order, his tone brooking no argument.

“Thanks, Mr. Norton. I’m not hungry at the moment, so I’d like to continue with my work for a while,” Joan declined tactfully. She had been doing her best to avoid having too much interaction with him although her efforts had been futile.

“This is just business, what with me having a meal with a collaborator. So, don’t read too much into it. Also, I’ve got some business matters to discuss with you.” Larry gave her no room to turn him down. “Let’s go.”

At that, Joan inwardly heaved a sigh. Good grief, why am I still so obedient to him, just like I did in the past?

Subsequently, the two of them went to a western restaurant and took their seats at the table.

“Just order whatever you want to eat.” Larry handed the menu to Joan.

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"Thank you." After thanking him politely, Joan ordered a steak. Likewise, Larry also ordered something at random.

Thereafter, a long silence reigned. Larry was waiting for Joan to speak, but the latter still seemed exceedingly reluctant to do so.

In the end, he broke the silence himself. "The proposal is almost done, right?"

"Yes," Joan replied softly. "It should be ready by tomorrow."

"What's your plan after that?" An unprecedented bolt of apprehension shot through Larry at the thought that he would no longer have an excuse to seek her out in the future.

"My plan? I don't have any plans. I just want to focus on my job and live a simple life. That's enough for me," Joan answered calmly.

Also, to stay away from you. She added inwardly after she finished saying that.

"I see." Words eluded Larry for a moment, so he buried his head in his food.

Unbeknownst to them, it so happened that Gabriella's best friend, Lynette, witnessed the lunch date and even secretly took a video clip of it.

After the two of them had finished eating, Larry drove Joan back to the office before speeding off. When Joan had returned to the office, she continued working on the proposal.

Lynette then sent the video clip to Gabriella. After watching it, Gabriella blew a fuse.

Ever since she met Joan the previous time, she had sensed that her relationship with Larry wasn't as simple as they claimed. Thus, she had someone investigated the matter, only to discover that they actually dated during college.

She went abroad to Beskary then, so she didn't know about their relationship before that.

"You're such a vixen, Joan Watts! How dare you attempt to seduce Larry again when I treated you so well in the past? What an ungrateful wretch!" Gabriella hissed through gritted teeth.

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She had been regarding Larry as her prospective boyfriend, so she felt as though someone had stolen something off hers upon seeing that Joan and Larry could possibly rekindle their relationship.

That feeling was particularly acute when she could distinctly sense that Larry still loved Joan. While she had no evidence of that, her womanly intuition told her otherwise. As that thought occurred to her, the unease within her snowballed.

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