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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2601 - 2610

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2601

Miles away, everyone was busy working in Norton Corporation. At the same time, Larry was troubled by the orders of which M Group had recently canceled.

“Larry, what do you plan to do about it?” Caspian asked.

Larry pressed his temples, thinking about possible solutions to the conundrum.

Suddenly, his eyes beamed as an idea flashed through his mind. He immediately stood up and came up to his desk.

“Have the products been manufactured?”

“Yes, the products have been manufactured based on the orders.”

Caspian couldn't help but feel bewildered as he was replying to Larry's question.

“Larry, since M Group has terminated its partnership with us, why did you...”

“We still have a lot of partners, am I right? For instance, Della is one of them,” Larry gazed at Caspian and replied seriously.

Given that Della always wanted to collaborate with Larry, he thought he could also help fulfill her wish through this.

“Larry, have you really decided to collaborate with Ms. Duff?” Caspian continued asking.

“Why not? I'm going to expand our business to the international market!” With that, Larry grabbed his jacket and walked out of the office.

Caspian never doubted Larry's capability for a second. Since he was determined to expand his business, Caspian was willing to support him unconditionally. Besides, Caspian believed that Larry would definitely become a successful international entrepreneur in the future.

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“What did you say? Does Larry really want to collaborate with Della? Is the plan even workable?” Back in Caspian and Jessica’s house, Jessica asked him worriedly.

“Why isn’t it workable? I mean, they will be official business partners,” Caspian explained.

I’m afraid that from being business partners, they might eventually become partners on the bed! As the thought flashed through her mind, Jessica looked away disdainfully.

“Well, don’t overthink it. You know very well that he’s a man with noble values,” Caspian murmured.

“Yes, and I have faith in his character. However, I doubt whether Della can behave herself,” Jessica replied sarcastically.

On the surface, Della had given up on Larry, but Jessica was aware that she still had feelings for him. In fact, Della was only waiting for an appropriate opportunity to court him.

Jessica was confident about her sixth sense.

However, Joan was completely unaware of it.

“Alright, don’t talk nonsense to Joan,” Caspian reminded her.

“Hey, I’m not an idiot. Why would I tell such things to her?” Once Jessica finished, she went into the kitchen.

Before long, Larry formally established a business partnership with Della.

“To success!” Della said softly while lifting her wine glass.

“To success!” Larry responded.

Once their partnership was formalized, Larry’s business was expanded to the international market, while Della’s business also set foot in this country.

“Larry, rumor has it that Jake wants to acquire Joan’s photography studio,” Meanwhile, Caspian whispered to Larry in the office.

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"I knew that," Larry replied.

Caspian was instantly stunned by his calm response. Why is Larry composed since he's aware of it?

"Joan will solve it on her own," Larry added to overcome his qualms.

Deep down, Larry knew that Joan wouldn't like it if someone meddled in any affairs related to her photography studio.

Perhaps, she'll agree to Jake's acquisition! Larry stood up and gazed at the sky outside the window calmly as though he was looking forward to seeing how she would deal with it.

Regardless of her decision, there was no question that he would support her.

"I want to meet your president!" Miles away, Joan was yelling in the lobby of M. Group.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Watts. We can't allow you to meet our president because you don't have an appointment." The receptionist declined her request without giving her demand due consideration.

"Please tell him that Joan Watts wishes to discuss matters related to the photography studio with him," Joan added determinedly.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Watts. Please leave," the receptionist advised.

"Jake, come out!" Joan suddenly shouted at the people on the first floor.

"Who the hell is that? How can she be so rude?"

"Well, she's probably just a shrew."

A few staff gazed at Joan with disdain written all over their faces.

"Who's making noise out there?" Meanwhile, Jake asked his assistant while reading through some documents in his office.

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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2602

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2602

"It's...Joan Watts," Ted stole a glance at Jake before he lowered his head and replied hesitantly.

What is she doing here? Jake lifted his head instinctively and stared at him in bewilderment.

Ted explained immediately, "She requested to see you at once regarding the acquisition of the photography studio."

Does it mean she has thought it through and is willing to let go of the photography studio? Jake put his pen down and stood up slowly. He walked toward the sofa as snippets of the previous incident flashed across his mind.

She was flung by me onto the tombstone at that time. Did she sustain any injuries? There was a glint of complex emotions in his eyes.

No way! Jake Wilson, you mustn't sympathize with her! She's the culprit for Faye's death! Because of her, you have lost the love of your life forever! In a split second, Jake's eyes were as cold as abyss.

"Mr. Wilson, should I let her come up or chase her away?" Ted, who was still waiting aside asked warily.

"Let her come up!" Jake grimaced and bellowed.

Ted was taken aback by his sudden intimidating vibe.

"N-noted!" he stuttered before staggering out of Jake's office.

"Ms. Watts, our president agrees to see you. This way please..." he gestured to Joan courteously.

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Before he could finish his words, Joan walked past him and went upstairs at once.

Gazing at her figure, he shook his head and let out a deep sigh.

The moment Joan stepped into Jake's office, she saw the man sitting idly with legs crossed on the sofa. "Why are you here?" Jake asked Joan directly without lifting his head and sparing a glance at her.

"Have you made up your mind to acquire the photography studio?" Joan asked softly with a sense of guilt on her face.

"Yes," Jake replied coldly with a grim look on his face.

"I understand that you won't change your mind anymore. Yet I only have one condition. Can you promise me?" she mustered up her courage and asked tactfully.

"Huh? One condition? Joan Watts, have you lost your memories? Do you think you still have any rights to negotiate with me now?" he scoffed at her.

Feeling dejected, Joan was rendered speechless on the instant.

He's right. Faye has just passed away. No doubt I have no right to talk things out with him.

"Jake, I can't stop you from taking over the photography studio, but can you promise me not to dissolve my team in the photography studio? All of them are very talented and capable..."

Jake cut her off and snapped, "Joan Watts, this is none of your business once the photography studio is in my possession! The decision lies in my hands!"

He has really changed! He's not the same Jake Wilson whom I used to know. It's because of Faye's death!

"Jake, I truly understand that you can never forgive me. However, you can't treat my people unfairly just because of your abhorrence toward me! All of them are innocent!" Joan yelled at him.

The next moment, Jake walked toward her and glared at her. Taking a deep breath, he turned and snarled coldly, "Thanks for reminding me that the team members are all your

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people! Since they are all related to you, I'll kick them one by one out of the photography studio!"

Instantaneously, Joan's heart fell. He's obviously avenging Faye by torturing me!

"Jake, tell me, what am I supposed to do so you would grant me forgiveness?" Joan asked wearily.

She still has the nerve to beg for my forgiveness? What nonsense! He snickered silently within himself and stormed out of his office.

By then, Joan was standing by herself in the room like a lone ranger.

Looks like he would never forgive me and is determined to kick the whole team out of the photography studio sooner or later. Oh no! All the team members would be jobless because of me! I must find a way to help them! After pondering for a while and trying to cool her head off, Joan left Jake's office hastily.

In the photography studio, the employees were huddling over and discussing something in great excitement.

"Ms. Watts!" one of the employees yelled excitedly the moment Joan's figure came into view.

"What are you doing?" Joan asked curiously.

"We are on strike!" another young employee replied confidently.

On strike? Are they aware of what they are doing at the moment? Joan was puzzled and looked at them quizzically.

"Ms. Watts, we have overheard long ago that Jake Wilson is planning to acquire our photography studio. You don't have to keep it from us anymore. No matter what, we have decided to tag along with you wherever you go," the young employee said in high spirits.

"Yeah, Ms. Watts, we won't part with you! You'll be our superior forever!"

"Ms. Watts, we want to work for you forever! You're the best leader!"

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On the instant, their words warmed Joan's heart and choked her up.

What an outstanding team! I'm really impressed by their strong bond with each other and remarkable team spirit. Too bad Jake is going to dissolve the team right after he acquires the photography studio.

"Don't be silly, what can you do if you tag along with me? All of you are capable and will surely have better career advancement elsewhere," Joan lowered her head and mumbled.

"Ah! I have an idea! All of us can chip in to set up a photography studio!" one of the photographers' faces lit up as he yelled jubilantly.

"Great idea! We can think about it..."

Within seconds, the employees were chattering excitedly again.

At the sight of the employees who were willing to continue supporting her in setting up a new studio, Joan's eyes started to well up with tears.

It was a blessing for her to have such a supportive team.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2603

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2603

After a while, all of them were back to their workstations again and continued with their tasks. Even after they knew that the photography studio would be acquired, the conscientious team decided to carry out their duties till the last minute.

Meanwhile, Jake's mother had dropped by his office earlier. Ever since Faye had perished, grief and hatred had turned Jake into a cold-hearted person. He was determined to seek vengeance against the culprit who had caused his beloved woman's death. Hence, he told himself not to let Joan off easily. In his eyes, the woman with whom he was deeply in love previously had become a murderer who ruined his happiness. He vowed to pay her back on behalf of the love of his life.

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“Do you think it’s appropriate to do so?” she asked him with knitted brows.

She did not wish to see her son turn into a ruthless person without a sense of sympathy.

“I don’t see any issues,” he replied placidly.

“Mom, don’t worry about me. I know what I’m doing. Just go back first,” he added casually.

“Jake, no matter what you do, I will always be supportive of you. However, I hope you would never be regretful of what you insist to do right now.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t regret.”

Heaving a silent sigh, she knew that her son was adamant and would not easily take her advice. She had no choice but to leave his office in silence.

“Keep an eye on him closely and update me on his whereabouts from time to time,” she instructed Ted, who was seated outside his office.

Ted nodded in acknowledgement as he bowed at her.

In the meantime, Jake was trying to go through the documents on his desk, yet Faye’s figure was floating in his mind. Earlier on, they had tentatively planned to have their wedding ceremony at the end of the year, yet it had become a dream that was impossible to be fulfilled. He would never have the chance to see her in a wedding gown anymore! My dream is shattered because of Joan Watts!

Bang! He unleashed the suffocating exasperation by punching hard on the wall. In a blink of an eye, blood dripped from his finger, yet he was oblivious to the pain. It was as if his senses were utterly numbed by the stabbing pain in his heart.

The photography studio could not be saved from falling into Jake’s hands. On the day he emerged as the official new owner of the company, all the employees followed in Joan’s footsteps and left.

“Ms. Watts, let’s have a celebration tonight!” one of the young employees suggested eagerly.

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“Everyone, stop calling me Ms. Watts from now onwards. I’m not your leader anymore. Just call me Joan,” Joan said softly in embarrassment.

“As for the celebration, let’s proceed with it!” she announced.

What’s there to celebrate? Still in the mood even when we are jobless? Of course we should celebrate since our team is not dissolved!

“Ah! Isn’t that Joan Watts?”

Out of a sudden, there was a familiar voice from behind her.

Isn’t that Abelyn Chipman? Joan put up her guard the moment she saw Abelyn approach her with a meaningful grin.

Wait a minute! The man who stands alongside her is Dustin?

How did both of them end up together? I never know that they know each other! She gazed at both of them in bewilderment.

“Joan, how are you?” Dustin gazed at her and greeted her casually.

“Ms. Chipman, long time no see,” Joan greeted her at once placidly.

“Yeah, it’s been a while,” Abelyn replied briefly with a sense of sarcasm in her voice.

“How are things going on with you lately?” she asked further.

“Everything is fine,” Joan replied indifferently.

The other employees’ curiosity was piqued as they observed the three of them. Knowing that both of the women were having grudges against each other, they decided to stand up for Joan.

“Ms. Chipman, we’re grateful to your friends. Because of them, the photography studio had appeared on TV previously and gained popularity in a way!” one of the young employees sneered at her.

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Needless to doubt, Abelyn could sense the hidden meaning behind her words, yet she pretended that she did not sense anything.

“Stop making any assumptions. I’m on a different stance with them,” Abelyn refuted.

“They really have no sense of shame,” one of the photographers commented indignantly.

“Don’t you know that money is power? Nothing is impossible when you have money in your hands! Look at how Jake managed to acquire the photography studio within such a short span of time!” she added arrogantly.

Ever since she knew that Jake was planning to acquire the photography studio, she stopped provoking Joan. Knowing that Jake was far more powerful than her, she could just sit back and wait for him to put Joan in deep waters.

“Abelyn, mind your words,” Dustin nudged her elbow and reminded her at once.

“Dustin, both of you know each other?” Joan asked him right away.

“Of course we know each other. We are best friends,” Abelyn chimed in complacently and held onto Dustin’s arm tightly.

What? They are close friends? If that’s the case, is Dustin the mastermind manipulating everything all this while?

“Dustin, please be frank with me. Do you have anything to do with the acquisition of the photography studio?” Joan asked desperately.

“Who do you think you are to ask such a strange question? Abelyn moved to stand in front of Dustin and said disdainfully.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2604

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2604

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Dustin remained silent with his head lowered, avoiding having any eye contact with Joan as he was overcome by a sense of guilt. He was aware of the matter, but he was not involved with it. Even so, he was still considered as hurting Joan in a way by keeping mum about it.

“Alright, I have the answer for myself.” Joan turned and left at once in disappointment.

“Joan!” the young employee behind her yelled and quickened her pace to catch up with her.

Dustin’s eyes darkened as Joan’s figure vanished from his view. He did not have any idea how he should explain to her...

“Joan, try to cool down. There’s no point to cry over spilled milk. The most important thing at the moment is to stay strong and look ahead, isn’t it?” the young employee consoled Joan gently.

As her senior, Joan definitely knew well about those theories as well. It is really not worth it to brood over something that had happened. I should get over it soon and move on! She was just a bit disappointed with Dustin as she never expected that he would just turn a blind eye to Jake’s plan.

Forget about it! We are never on the same stance!

“Let me treat all of you a meal!” she announced sportingly and strode in front of them.

“Hurray!” Everyone applauded and cheered up in an instant.

While walking along the way to the place, the employees were joking and bickering around with each other. A few of them were even singing and shaking their bodies. Nobody would have guessed that they were actually a group of people who were jobless at the moment and overcome with career uncertainty. The other pedestrians were intimidated by their exaggerative demeanor when they shrieked and laughed occasionally. Some of them even suspected that they were intoxicated and tried to walk around them with a strange expression.

“Slow down! Safety first!” Joan turned to check on them from time to time.

“Joan, since when you start to nag like my Mom!” one of the young employees could not help feeling amused and burst into laughter.

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“Anyway, you’re still a lot younger than my Mom!”

“What’re you talking about? How can you be so rude to Joan!”

The young employees started to play chasing games among themselves again and giggled as they bickered with each other.

It’s actually good to see them in such a playful way. It means they are not easily shaken by the acquisition of the photography studio. Joan was relieved to see their smiling faces and liveliness.

The loss of the photography studio did not mark the end of their career. They could start all over again at any time. As long as she had her team by her side, there was nothing to be feared.

“All of you have put a lot of effort in assisting me all this while. I really appreciate your contribution and support for me. All of you are the best!” Joan raised her wine glass and yelled at them thankfully.

“From now onwards, our team would never be dissolved, and all of us would never part with each other. Dare to dream and let’s hope for a better future!” Everyone applauded at her motivating words.

“Cheers!” They clank glasses with each other jovially.

On the other hand, both Della and Larry were celebrating with each other as well.

“If Joan finds out that both of us are collaborating with each other, she would surely be displeased. What are we supposed to do then?” Della asked directly.

“It’s just a matter of time. She will get to know about this sooner or later,” Larry replied casually.

“You’re not worried that she would be green with envy?” she asked tactfully.

“No, she won’t. I’ve spoken to her about this earlier on,” he explained placidly.

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Della had talked herself into letting go of Larry and giving him her best wishes upon his relationship with Joan. However, she found that she could not put the stunning man in front of her out of her mind as time passed.

“Larry, if I start to pursue you again one day, what would you do?” Della asked deliberately.

“You should always look ahead! Don’t look back,” Larry hinted her.

Della smiled bitterly at Larry’s words. He had emphasized to her previously that there would just be pure friendship between them. She knew that she should move on and avoid dwelling on it.

Even so, he was still the apple of her eye as no other man could catch her eye. Thus, she would never give up on him.

“Larry, just answer my question.” She requested a concrete answer from him.

“Della, I wish to make it clear. If you have other hidden motives behind our collaboration, I would rather it be called off at once,” Larry replied firmly.

Della was not surprised at his words. In fact, she had predicted that he would answer her in that way.

“Looks like I have nothing that could catch your eye,” Della sighed and finished the wine in her wineglass in one gulp.

“It has nothing to do with that. After all, we are just business partners,” Larry reminded her.

He’s really a meticulous man with a sharp sense! Della turned and stared off into the distance out of the window. Her mind sank into deep contemplation.

She was becoming more frustrated as her heart was filled with resentment. She could not understand why Larry was obsessed with such an ordinary woman like Joan. As a socialite with great charm, she was used to the flattering words from men who fell heads over heels for her. Yet Larry was not the least bit attracted by her!

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"You are a great woman with outstanding looks and capabilities. In fact, there are many other men who are drawn to you. I truly believe you will come across your Mr. Right one day. I hereby wish you all the best in advance!" Larry raised his wineglass at her and took a sip.

Huh! I'm surprised that such a grandiose statement would be out from his mouth! Della sneered and was at a loss for words.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2605

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2605

As expected, he treats me exactly like how he treats any of his clients. He is apparently drawing a line between us with his courtesy, humility, and flattery.

"Thanks for the best wishes," Della forced a smile and replied.

Late at night, both Larry and Joan were in the living room. "What do you plan to do?" he turned to ask Joan who was seated beside him on the sofa.

She was staring into space and lost in her own thoughts.

At the moment, she was feeling dispirited like an inflated balloon.

She had lost her confidence all of a sudden as she was unable to foresee where she stood in the future. Apart from that, she could not assure that there would not be any changes to the team as well.

"If you plan to set up a new photography studio, I can invest in it," Larry offered her.

The plan had crossed his mind long ago, yet Joan had rejected him right away when he brought up the topic.

She hoped she could sort things out and pursue her career with her own capabilities, and not just solely relying on Larry.

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"No, thanks," Joan turned him down again softly as she stood up and moved toward the window.

She has really changed! Gazing at Joan who was standing by the window, there were indecipherable complex emotions in his eyes.

Perhaps, I need to give her more time to ponder before she finally finds her direction!

"Why do both of you stay up till now? Is there anything?" Delilah asked them with great concern.

"Ms. Young," Joan turned instinctively and greeted her.

"It's getting late. Both of you'd better go to bed soon. Don't forget that you need to wake up early tomorrow morning. Oh yeah, Joan, I almost forget to tell you that Dustin came and looked for you today." She yawned and walked straight into her own room.

The moment Larry heard about Dustin's name, a wave of fury surged within him.

"What did he want with you?" he frowned at once and asked in exasperation.

"I have no idea," Joan replied.

At the peak of frustration due to the acquisition of the photography studio, she was emotionally exhausted and was unable to spare any second on other matters.

"Let's go to bed." Larry stood up and walked into the bedroom.

Joan entered the room after him and lay down silently beside him on the bed. Nevertheless, it was a sleepless night for her. As time elapsed, she continued to stay awake with her eyes widely open. Staring into the darkness outside the window, her gaze drifted off into deep contemplation.

The next morning, Larry woke up really early. He stretched his arms and turned to his side. To his surprise, he was alone on the bed. Where did she go? He looked around the room, yet there was no sign of her.

Did she stay up the whole night?

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“Joan!” He dashed out of the bedroom at once and yelled in the direction of the living room.

“She has stepped out long ago!” Delilah responded from the kitchen.

“Where did she go?”

“I’m not really sure. She mentioned something like she’s going to meet her team members from the photography studio,” Delilah replied.

She is reluctant to accept it when I offered to help her, yet she is thinking of setting up a new photography studio. How is she supposed to set up one without anyone’s help? I really don’t understand why is she making her own life difficult!

In the park, a group of people was gathering and they seemed to be discussing something excitedly. Joan’s arrival had spurred their excitement.

“Joan, have you thought it through and make up your mind?” a young employee asked softly.

Ever since their photography studio was acquired by Jake, they did not have a proper workplace. Since Joan was still in the midst of setting up a new company, they could only gather temporarily in the park, brainstorming on the future implementation for the new photography studio in advance.

“Setting up a new photography studio is not as simple as what we think. First of all, we need a large sum as our fund. Yet we don’t have any sponsor...” Joan said hesitantly.

She was looking forward to setting up a new photography studio so there would be a new workplace for the other employees. Nevertheless, she knew that she was still sort of in a recovery state and not prepared to overcome any potential obstacles after the new set-up.

I must think before I leap. At least I should have a backup plan so I won’t be helpless in case I encounter any financial crisis after setting up the new photography studio!

“Joan, you are afraid, aren’t you?” one of the young employees asked her directly.

She could not deny that her heart was filled with inexplicit uneasiness at the moment. After all, women, in general, were not as decisive as men and tended to spend more time contemplating prior to decision-making.

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“Don’t be afraid!” A familiar voice sounded abruptly from her back.

Joan turned spontaneously and was surprised to see Caiden. “Why are you here?” she gazed at Caiden and asked surprisingly.

“I heard that you are setting up a new photography studio?” He smiled at the crowd in front of him and asked directly.

“Yeah, we are still planning on it.” Joan replied frankly.

“Do you want to invest in it?” One of the photographers asked jokingly.

“Why not! You can count me in on that!” Caiden replied casually.

In an instant, everyone was dumbfounded.

“Are you joking?” A young employee asked in disbelief.

“Of course not! I’m serious with that!” Caiden shook his head and replied firmly.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2606

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2606

Joan was overwhelmed by Caiden’s sudden decision.

“Joan, I plan to set up a new photography studio. If you are willing to join me, you can bring along your whole team to work for me there. If not, I’ll invest in your new photography studio if you plan to set up one,” Caiden gazed seriously at Joan and said softly.

His words brightened up everyone at once. They exchanged looks with each other jubilantly.

Joan turned to look at her employees one by one. All of them nodded eagerly at her, urging her to take his suggestion.

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“Why are you thinking of setting up a photography studio all of a sudden?” she asked curiously.

“Of course it’s to gain profit. Money is never enough for a businessman!” Caiden winked at her and replied casually.

Caiden actually intended to lend Joan a hand in setting up the new photography studio. Nonetheless, he knew well that she was a woman of great pride and would not easily accept his generous offer. Thus, he could only tell white lies so as not to trigger her suspicion.

“Joan, why not we join his company and work for him?” one of the employees ran toward her and whispered into her ears.

Joan looked at Caiden hesitantly.

I’d better think it through and avoid making rash decision.

“Caiden, we are talking about setting up a new company. This is no joke,” she reminded him.

“I’m being serious and I really mean it,” Caiden replied firmly.

The other employees sensed the suddenly tense atmosphere and dragged the young employee aside, giving both of them space to talk things out.

“Joan, don’t think too much. I just intend to work together with you.” Caiden tried to convince her.

Is he telling the truth? Joan gazed at him suspiciously as she fell into deep thought.

Will Larry opposed to it if I really work for Caiden? She was in dilemma and could see no way out.

Caiden’s phone buzzed abruptly.

“Joan, I get to go now. Take my suggestions into consideration and think about them. I’ll wait for your reply.” He walked away as he was engaged in a phone conversation.

All the employees moved forward instantly and surrounded Joan.

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“Joan, how did you reply him?”

“Did you accept his proposals?”

“I feel that he’s not a bad guy. I bet there won’t be any issues to trust him.”

Joan’s temple started to throb as all of them were mumbling non-stop.

“What do you think about his suggestion?” Joan asked for their opinions.

Joan could be the sole decision-maker since she was their leader. However, she was never the type of superior who was domineering and self-centered. As a caring superior, she tended to take her subordinates’ opinions into consideration. That was why all the other employees were respectful of her.

“I’m thinking of having a try.”

“I have the same thought too.”

Within a short span of time, they had a conclusion.

Joan finally made up her mind and gave Caiden a call.

“If we choose to work for you, when do we need to report for work?” she asked directly.

Caiden was on cloud nine the moment Joan asked him the question. Ah! So she’s thinking of accepting my offer!

“I will get the related agreement on the setting up of the photography studio signed this afternoon. All of you can report for duty tomorrow,” he replied excitedly.

Staring at her phone, Joan was thinking hard about how she should explain to Larry about her decision to work for Caiden.

“Joan, what’s the matter with you? You are not happy that we will start working in the new company?” one of the employees asked.

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“Of course not. I’m glad about that,” Joan squeezed a smile and replied nonchalantly.

She was actually troubled when something came into her mind. The Owens family would surely have a misunderstanding about my relationship with Caiden if I join his company.

Anyway, it’s not the time to be bothered about that at the moment. Let’s see how things turn out then. After taking a deep breath, she continued to have further discussions with the employees pertaining to the matters of reporting for work at the new photography studio.

The next day, Joan led her team to Caiden’s newly set up photography studio.

“You’ll be fully in charge of this photography studio,” Caiden told Joan directly in his office.

Joan nodded in acknowledgement without saying anything.

Outside the office, all the employees were discussing their career advancement blissfully.

“You have a righteous and ambitious team. I’m looking forward to their contribution in gaining profit for the company. In return, I would reward all of them accordingly,” Caiden added casually.

Joan chuckled knowingly at his businesslike tone and countenance.

As a typical business-minded entrepreneur, the profit gained really mattered a lot to him. Thus, he was indirectly hinting that he had a high expectation of the efficiency of the employees at work. Apart from Joan, any of them could be asked to leave at any time if they were unable to meet his expectation in the future.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2607

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2607

“It’s a pleasure to be working with you.” Caiden held out his hand toward Joan, who shook his hand readily.

“The pleasure’s mine,’ she said.

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After sorting out some details of their collaboration, Caiden left the photography studio in full faith that Joan would be able to handle everything well.

“Are we gonna do some marketing, Ms. Watts?” one of the young employees asked.

Before Joan could reply, a photographer interrupted excitedly. “Of course! We should distribute some flyers.”

Opposite them, Joan nodded approvingly at the idea. “Alright then, we’ll go give out some flyers. I’ll treat y’all to dinner for helping me.”

“That’s so nice of you, Ms. Watts!” Everyone at the office was all fired up for their new endeavor.

Joan smiled at the thrilled lot and pulled out her phone to make a call. “Hi, Ms. Young, I’ll be eating out tonight,” she said softly, going over to the window.

“Someone’s buying you dinner?” Delilah asked incisively.

“I’m working late tonight, so...”

Joan’s voice trailed off as she contemplated what she should say. She was still not prepared to tell Delilah and Larry everything yet.

On the other end, Delilah felt her hesitation. “Is everything okay, Joan?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry. I have to get going. I’ll see you later. B-bye!”

Delilah looked at the phone in her hand apprehensively after Joan hung up. She was worried.

Why was she stuttering? Is everything alright?

The night was descending as the lonesome moon crept up the sky. The glaring lights from cars speeding down the road shone through the almost empty street as impatient drivers hurried home.

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“Why don’t we continue tomorrow, Ms. Watts? It’s getting cold, and people are leaving already,” one of the workers asked.

Joan looked around the vacant street and asked them to go home first.

None of them expected the weather to get this cold.

After all the others had left, Joan sat down on a stone chair beside the road, staring pensively at the pile of flyers in her hands.

“What are you doing here?” A voice rang in the cold night.

Hearing the familiar voice, she stood up and turned toward Larry as she hid the flyers behind her so he could not see it.

“There’s no use hiding. I saw everything,” he said lowly, walking toward her.

“What are you doing here?” Joan asked disconcertedly.

“I came here to send you your clothes.” He held out a bag toward her.

Joan shifted her gaze from his face and looked at the bag in his hands. A wave of warmth filled her heart.

She had no clue if Larry would be mad about her working at Caiden’s photography studio, but she knew Larry would not feel comfortable about it.

“Let’s go home,” he said.

“Larry, I...”

“It’s okay. I respect your decision.”

He would never dig deeper into the past.

“Are you angry?” Joan’s voice softened as she examined his face for a hint.

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Larry was upset, but not anymore.

"I'm okay." He let out a sigh and hugged her by the waist as both of them left.

Joan leaned closer into his arms like a tame cat coveting some warmth from his embrace.

Back at Delilah's house, Lucius was doing his homework when the two arrived.

"You guys are back," Delilah greeted them at the door.

"Yeah, we're back."

"I thought you said you wouldn't be back early, Joan?"

Delilah went up to her and took a good look at her from head to toe.

"What's the matter, Ms. Young?" Joan blinked her eyes in confusion looking at the worried woman.

"Are you alright?" Ms. Young asked.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2608

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2608

"Huh? I'm fine."

Joan's swift answer put Delilah's heart to rest.

"Mom! Come over and put your signature here," Lucius beckoned from the room.

"Right away!" Joan went over upon hearing her son.

Delilah cast her suspecting gaze at Larry after Joan left.

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“Everything’s okay. Don’t worry,” he assured, patting her on the shoulder.

Everyone went to bed for an early rest. The next day, Joan rose early and went to the photography studio without even having breakfast.

“Morning, Ms. Watts. Do you need any help?” Caiden greeted her first thing when he saw her at the office.

Joan looked at the man sitting comfortably on the couch and shot him a rigid smile.

“I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Don’t worry.”

Since she insisted that she could handle things on her own, Caiden left the studio after hanging around for a short five minutes.

After he left, the supervisor came over. “Ms. Watts, I think we need to recruit more people.”

“I think we’re doing just fine though,” Joan replied.

Caiden had not told her about his arrangement.

“It’s impossible we could do all this on our own,” the supervisor said.

Do what? What is there to do? Joan lifted her befuddled gaze.

“Mr. Owens struck a deal with a client. It’s a huge project...”

Joan finally understood why Caiden came to the photography studio this morning.

A frown settled on her brows. She did not like the way he handled things.

Over at the villa, Abelyn was sitting nonchalantly on the sofa sipping from a cup of warm coffee.

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“Joan is really something,” she commented, putting down her coffee.

“What are you trying to do this time?” Dustin asked anxiously without losing a moment.

“What’s with the tone? It’s not like I’ll kill her.” Abelyn shot him a quick glare.

Dustin evaded her stare and buried himself in the newspapers in his hands. God knows what you’re capable of?

“Jake had already acquired the photography studio, so you’d better stop here and leave Joan alone,” Dustin warned her severely.

That will depend on my mood. Abelyn walked to the balcony and tilted her head upward. She closed her eyes, enjoying the caress of the gentle breeze.

Dustin’s gaze trailed her movement and the man wondered what was going on in her mind. A shadow of sadness crept past his face as he looked at her.

Over at the photography studio, everyone went into action and got to work.

Despite her busy schedule, Joan managed to balance her life well. She and Larry went to work in the morning and spent time together at night. Life was simple but blissful.

Life went on like this until a man came looking for her at the studio unannounced. “Ms. Watts, someone’s waiting for you,” an employee informed.

An inexplicable sense of uneasiness developed in Joan’s heart.

She went into her office and saw a man sitting on the couch. From his back, she felt the man was somewhat familiar.

“Morning. I heard you’re looking...”

The man stood up and turned around before she could finish.

“Mr. Owens?”

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It was Caiden's father.

"Morning, Ms. Watts," he greeted coldly, "I bet you're feeling good about yourself. Not only do you have this whole studio under your control, but you also have Caiden in your hands."

Joan was appalled by the amount of bitterness in his tone.

What are you even talking about? I'm just an ordinary employee here.

"I believe there's a misunderstanding, Mr. Owens. Things are not as you imagined it to be."

"Tell me, what do I have to do to make you leave him?" Keith cut to the chase.

His undisguised intention disconcerted Joan.

She knew Keith would in no way let her come close to Caiden, although both of them were really just friends.

"I'm sure Caiden will give you a satisfactory explanation, Mr. Owens."

"Don't you even utter his name. You are not worthy!"

Over on the outside, all the employees were eyeing the two in the office. They were afraid something would happen to Joan.

Two of them seemed to be engaged in a heated argument. One of the women could not stand it any longer, so she pulled out her phone and made a call.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2609

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2609

"Mr. Owens? There's an old man over here at the studio. He's been in Ms. Watts' office for some time..."

Not long after Caiden received the call, a black car pulled up by the studio's entrance.

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“What’s going on?” Caiden ran in and asked.

“I’m not sure, but the old man sure looks fierce.” The woman who called filled him in on what was happening.

Caiden dashed into the office and finally saw the visitor.

What is he doing here?

Both Keith and Joan were startled to see Caiden himself at the office door.

“What are you doing here?” the old man roared with dissatisfaction written all over his face.

“I should be the one asking this question, Dad.”

Everyone were shocked to hear Caiden’s blatant reply.

“He’s Mr. Owens’ dad?” one of the whispered.

“Oh my gosh. I can’t believe I just badmouthed him.”

The air suddenly became cold in the studio.

“Mr. Owens, I think you should step in and explain things,” Joan remarked before stepping out.

All she wanted was to do her job and lead her team well. She had no intention whatsoever in meddling with the Owens’ family affairs.

“What do you want to say, Dad?” Caiden sat down on the other end of the couch.

“Why is she working here? Why did you even open a new photography studio?”

“I’m a businessman. I want to earn money.”

What a joke! Keith scoffed and turned away. He took deep breaths to calm down the raging fury in his heart.

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Our family is not in need of money!

“Close this studio, or lay her off,” the spiteful old man seethed.

“You asked me to return to the company, and I did. I went back and did everything you asked me to do. You asked me to start a business, and that was exactly what I did too. I put in all my effort to seal as many deals as I can, but this does not mean you can control every single thing I do! Besides, it’s not like I did something wrong.”

Keith was totally not expecting his son to speak his mind so argumentatively.

What Caiden said was true. Ever since he went back to the Owens family, what he did was beyond expectation, and Keith was satisfied with his performance, yet things changed when Joan appeared. This made him scared. He was afraid his son would give up on his ambitions because of this woman—he was afraid his son might give up on the family.

Caiden knew his father’s concern. “I promise I’ll never forsake the family, neither will I leave the company.”

Keith looked at Joan indecisively. “But she...”

“No buts,” Caiden cut him short.

The old man grunted and finally nodded. As long as he had Caiden’s words, he would tolerate Joan’s presence in his son’s life.

Not long after, the father and son walked out the office.

“What’s going on, Ms. Watts? Why did the two Owens come to see you?” the young woman asked.

“Mind your own business.” Joan flicked her forehead and pulled her back to work.

Joan felt awkward facing all the employees at the studio, so she went into her office.

She flung herself on the couch and stared right into the ceiling. She felt so weighed down by everything that was happening in her life.

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“Are you okay?” Caiden had come in without her realizing it.

“I thought you left?” She turned and looked at him in bewilderment.

“I went down to send him off.”

“I see. Don’t worry, I’m fine.”

“I won’t let this happen again,” he assured.

Joan was not sure if she should take his word for it.

Over at the meeting room in Norton Corporation, things were not going easy for Larry as well, especially when all the shareholders were looking at him condescendingly.

“Mr. Norton, I don’t think your proposal is gonna work,” an old shareholder said.

“What’s your take on this matter then?” Larry solicited his opinion humbly.

He knew there would be an objection to his proposal to restructure, so he came prepared.

“It’s just too risky. The company has always opted for safer options. We can’t just change our operating strategy overnight.”

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2610

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2610

“Yeah, we’re not young anymore. It’s not like we can still take unwarranted risks.”

“Exactly. You can’t expect us to keep up with the young people these days,” another added.

A few shareholders said their minds without reservation, expressing without concealing their discontent toward Larry.

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We're gonna see how long you can last. Larry looked into their eyes as they tried to coerce him to back off.

"I know it's difficult to see the potential in this change, but I can guarantee..."

"What can you guarantee? What can you do if the company goes bankrupt?" One of them stood up and mocked.

Everyone in the meeting room became increasingly pugnacious.

Caspian charged toward the impudent old man, but Larry caught him by the arm.

"I still have something else to do, so please excuse me, Mr. Norton," one of them said.

Larry totally expected their change in attitude.

He had heard that some of them had colluded with each other to oust him from Norton Corporation. Now that he interacted with them, it only confirmed what he heard.

"Larry, are you gonna just let them be?" Caspian asked with question marks in his eyes.

This was not the Larry he knew.

"Just let them be. It won't be long before they change their minds," Larry assured.

Caspian did not know what plan Larry had in mind, but he believed Larry had everything under control.

"Are you okay?" Jessica asked, walking over.

She had heard about what happened from her assistant and she came over out of worry.

"I'm good."

Jessica was clearly not convinced. She turned and looked at Caspian, who did not say a word but simply nodded. She knew they must have everything planned.

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“Do you need any help?” she asked after understanding what was going on.

Jessica’s business was going on well and she now had an extensive network of connections. She knew she would be able to assist Larry.

“Nope, I’m good.”

That’s it? Jessica scrutinized Larry’s expression but found nothing out of the norm. It seemed like the situation did not bug him at all.

After she made sure everything was alright, Jessica left.

Since business was good at her bookstore, she had opened up a few branches. This business endeavor itself was enough to keep her occupied, but her heart was still not at peace after she walked out of Norton Corporation.

She squinted her eyes at the sky as she thought about what she should do.

I’ll go look for Joan.

With that in mind, she went over to the photography studio.

When Jessica arrived, Joan was at her table learning new things about photography. As the person in charge of the studio, she took it on herself to improve her knowledge about her field of work.

“Joan!” Jessica cried out as she barged in.

“Hi! What are you doing here?”

“I came because I miss you,” Jessica answered cheekily, “How’s everything here at the studio?”

“All good.”

Outside the office, a photographer had his eyes fixed on Jessica ever since she came in.

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“Hey, what are you doing?” His female supervisor patted him on the shoulder.

“Oh, nothing.” The man quickly collected himself and shook his head.

A playful smile played on her lips looking at his reaction.

“Don’t tell me you fell for her?” she asked.

“Come on, I just think she looks familiar.”

Back in the office, Joan asked for an update from Jessica. “How’s everything?”

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