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## Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2384 - 2386

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She was not siding Jory. After she got to know the hardships Larry went through, she saw things differently. *Sometimes, it can be tough being a man.*

“Of course not. I had your interest in mind. I felt so sad when I saw Larry drained by what happened recently, so...” she hesitantly tried to explain.

She did not have to finish her sentence. Nancy understood where she was coming from.

“Joan, your phone is ringing.”

“Coming!” Joan responded as she came hurrying out from the washroom.

“Where are you? I’ll go and pick you up.” It was Larry.

“I’m at Nancy’s place. You don’t have to do that. Let’s meet at the restaurant.” She cared dearly for him and wanted him to get more rest.

Joan was about to hang up when Larry cut in, “Just stay there. I’ll pick you up.” He hung up without giving her a chance to object.

“What’s up? You have a date with Larry?” Nancy probed, looking at her inquisitively from the sofa.

“Let him court you like before. It’s good that you can enjoy the sweet ‘I’m in love’ experience again,” she jested.

*At this age? Romance is not a high priority after you have kids.* To Joan, what was more important was for the family to have a peaceful and happy life. Everything else was secondary.

“Hey, your precious is crying again. You’d better attend to her.” Joan directed her attention back to her baby.

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Nancy immediately picked up her baby and started pacifying her, "Mommy is here. It's alright. No more crying, my precious baby."

"What? You are not kidding me, are you? Joan is back?" Dustin shouted in disbelief, his gaze fixed on Jory.

He had been trying to find out about Joan's whereabouts without success for a long time. It was a little unreal when he suddenly heard that she was back.

"Yes, she is back. She came to visit Nancy yesterday," Jory replied listlessly.

*By this time, she would be aware of my unsuccessful attempt to take over Norton Corporation. Would she hate me for that?* Remorse and sorrow overwhelmed Dustin.

"Have a good chat and explain to her," Jory patted him on his back and consoled.

Dustin knew Joan well. She valued integrity in a person and would despise him for the unscrupulous move he made. Dustin dejectedly took out a cigarette and started smoking.

"Since when did you start smoking so heavily?" Jory was concerned. "Since the day Joan left." That was Dustin's reply.

Jory could clearly see that Joan had a special place in Dustin's heart all this while. His love for her had never changed, be it before or after her divorce. His motivation to fight for Norton Corporation was also her.

"They have not remarried. You still stand a chance," Jory reminded him. The fact was, Larry and Joan only had eyes for each other, and they would not let anyone into their hearts.

Dustin looked out of the window and sighed wearily. He knew Joan would not marry any other man even if she divorced Larry. And Larry would ultimately marry her again.

"It's not going to work," Dustin despondently replied.

Jory felt sorry for the disheartened Dustin.

The greatest weakness of his buddy was his stubbornness. Once he set his heart on someone, he would not give up easily.

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"Are you going to meet her?" Jory was curious.

*Of course! I still stand a chance so long as she and Larry are not married.* He still harbored a faint hope.

"She is at the park. Do you want to go there to take a look?" Dustin turned around to look at Jory, gave him a smile, then hurriedly went out.

Yes, he was heading out to meet her! Joan was seated on a bench in the park and staring into the sky. She could not understand why Dustin was picking on Larry and undermining Norton Corporation.

"Excuse me, could you please kick the ball over to me?" Her thoughts were interrupted by a little kid's shout.

Joan looked down and saw a football next to her. The earnest look in the kid's eyes reminded her of Lucius.

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"Sure!" She extended her right leg and gently kicked the ball back to the little kid. Dustin was watching her from afar.

That was why he fell for her. She was kind, innocent and he loved her loving and gentle interactions with kids.

"Joan." She was in a terrible mood when she heard that familiar voice calling out to her. Should I ask him about his attempt to sabotage Norton Corporation? He should be feeling remorseful, right? For a moment, she was lost for words when she faced him.

"Why are you here alone?" Dustin asked tenderly. "I just wanted to take a breather. What about you? It has been a long time. How are you?" Joan returned.

"I'm fine, but I missed you." He was direct.

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Joan was taken aback and speechless. She sidestepped and changed the subject. "I heard business at the supermarket was slow recently.

She did not have to hear that from anyone. Dustin was in such a sad state, and that said it all. "Still manageable. What about you? I heard you went on a vacation. Are you feeling better after the trip?" he asked with concern.

"I'm fine." The park was eerily quiet as they exchanged pleasantries awkwardly.

Joan was contemplating whether or not to ask him about Norton Corporation, while Dustin was also pondering if he should confess to her what he did to the Nortons. They were both mulling over the same subject but did not dare to bring it up.

It took him much effort to win her over as a friend. Dustin desperately hoped he will not lose her respect over the Norton Corporation incident.

"Are you okay?" Joan gently asked. "I'm fine. What can go wrong?" he replied with a forced smile.

"Dustin, don't you have anything to tell me?" Joan finally could not suppress herself and pointedly asked him. There should be no secrets between friends, especially between old friends like them.

Dustin hesitated, and his expression clearly showed his sense of guilt. She knew, after all. Heck! Rather than letting her imagination run wild, I might as well come clean.

"Yes, I have a confession, Joan. You may think I am evil, but you cannot deny the fact that I love you. I wanted to win you over from Larry and marry me. I wanted to destroy Larry, to crush his confidence..."

He was brutally honest and direct. Joan thought she was mentally prepared for anything he threw at her, but his words still gave her the shudders.

"Why? I thought we were friends? Why did you do this to me? Don't you know when you destroy Larry, you are destroying me at the same time?" Joan did not mince her words as well.

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He wasn't surprised she said that as he could see it coming. Her heart was filled with love for Larry, with no place left for him.

"Why are you so cruel?" Dustin brooded. Joan was bewildered. She did not know what wrong she had done to him. Or, how she had offended this man.

"Dustin, I hope you remember that you are my savior and friend," she offered.

"Then?" he asked.

"And, that's all we can be." That was her reply. As expected, she was resolute.

And true enough, he had no place in her heart. The saddest part was, he had spent so many years waiting for her.

"I always wanted to maintain a good relationship with you, but you keep trying to put us in trouble," Joan continued.

"Joan, you know I can never co-exist with Larry!" It would be a miracle if two love rivals can get along peacefully. "Fine. This is the end then." With that, she stood up to leave.

Dustin pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. "Could you give me another chance, please?" His pleading was so heartfelt and ardent that she nearly succumbed. "Let go of me!"

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"Dustin, are you out of your mind? Let go of me!" Joan shouted.

She never expected him to behave so disrespectfully towards her.

"Joan, can you please leave with me?" Dustin buried his face in her neck and begged.

His breathing was heavy and rapid. She knew he was aroused.

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"If you want to keep our friendship, then let me go this instant," she barked coldly.

Unfortunately, he was not interested in being her friend. He had always seen her as his better half, or even his wife!

"I've pinned for you for too long. I do not wish to wait any longer," he cried out.

Who asked him to wait? From the start, I have made it clear that it was impossible for anything to happen between the two of us!

"Dustin, I am not going to repeat myself. If you continue to behave like this, I will not show you any mercy!" Joan had a glint of menace in her eyes as she warned him.

"No, I am not letting go!"

Ouch! Dustin let out a scream. Joan bit into his arm with all her might.

"From this moment, we shall not meet again. Don't come looking for me, and we will take it as we have never met before." Joan turned and stormed off after leaving him these harsh words.

What a ruthless woman! How cruel of her! Dustin was left standing there with his fist clenched, disgruntled. He could not understand how Larry was superior to him. He could not understand why Joan was so besotted with that jerk! They are divorced, and she is single now, yet she refuses to give me a chance.

That is so unfair!

Thump! Dustin waved his fist and hit the tree next to him. Blood oozed out between his fingers, but he could not feel any pain.

No pain could compare to the heartache he felt at that moment.

The phone in his pocket had been ringing non-stop, but he was too devastated to notice it. After a long while, he finally snapped out of his distress and answered the call.

"How did it go? Is everything okay?" Jory's voice was filled with concern.

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"I failed." Dustin replied feebly.

Joan was the only woman he had ever loved. Since she came into his world, he had no place in his heart for any other woman. Unfortunately, she had already taken someone else into her heart.

Jory was seated at a corner table of a cafe, sipping on his coffee, waiting for someone.

Soon, a sullen man walked in.

"Leave!" Out of the blue, Jory uttered this. Dustin lifted his head to look at him, puzzled.

"Joan is not interested in you. It made no difference whether she was still married or divorced. You knew where you stand, Dustin, so please stop this foolish act," Jory implored.

Yes, indeed, he was foolish! Foolish enough to pin for that woman for so many years.

"But I can't let go of her," Dustin cried, wretched. Why couldn't he just let go? She has Larry, and she is contented.

"You should pursue your own happiness and stop wasting your time and efforts on Joan," Jory continued to persuade him.

He hated to see his best buddy wallowing in sorrow over this unrequited love.

Moreover, it was a pointless one-sided obsession. He had been in denial and refused to acknowledge the reality.

The two men had a long chat. The sky was dark when Dustin shuffled out of the cafe, crestfallen.

His only weakness was Joan. He would do anything to win her over, to save their relationship. Unfortunately, his dream shattered because of Larry.

It was sad that life played cruel jokes on Dustin, but he got used to all the lemons thrown at him. As a man, he could only suck it up and bear with everything.

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