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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2181

He had been married before, yet he's still so shy? Larry shook his head and let out a sigh.

"Why did you sigh?" Caspin wondered out loud.

Does he think I don't deserve Jessica's love?

This problem had been troubling Caspian for some time now. Jessica was the daughter of a rich manufacturer, but he was just a nobody. I don't think she'll ever fall in love with someone like me.

"Love is something you have to fight for. You can't just sit here and wait," Larry said, "You have to take the initiative and tell her how you feel about her. Otherwise, how would she know you're in love with her? You can't expect people to read your mind!"

He advised, "She might reject you now, but as long as she's still single, you'll always have a shot. And when the time is right, she might give you another chance."

He's right. I cannot sit here idly and do nothing. Even if she doesn't have any feelings for me now, that doesn't mean she'll not love me in the future.

"Okay. I'll do it," Caspian gave Larry a steady response.

Love is strange. On the one hand, it could boost a person's self-esteem, but on the other hand, it could also rob the confidence of that person. Likewise, Jessica, who was lying on the bed and looking at the sky outside the window, kept thinking about the differences between Larry and her.

She looked forward to spending the next two days with him. Due to her health condition, they could only have their outing by the beach.

"Hey, are you not going to join us?" Jessica shouted at Larry from afar.

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"You guys go ahead. I'll join you later," Larry shook his phone in the air and said.

He then turned to his phone and continued his call. "Got it. I'll take care of it when I return to the office on the day after tomorrow. Don't worry."

"We're supposed to have some fun together, but he's always on his phone. What a party pooper," Jessica pouted like an adorable child and complained.

On the other hand, Caspian was pleased that he could spend some time with her alone. "He has to take care of so many projects in his company. That's why he's always busy," Caspian explained.

"He's always busy, day and night. Argh!" Jessica mumbled in frustration.

"Give him a break, okay? He's so busy that he didn't have time to call Joan," Caspian said.

Upon hearing that, her expression turned grim almost instantly. Joan. That b*tch again.

But to Jessica, Larry being away from Joan was good news.

"Hey, do you think Joan trusts Larry? I mean, Larry could find any woman behind her back if he wants," Jessica asked intentionally.

Caspian burst out laughing. "Larry would never do such a thing, and Joan trusts him very much."

She seemed somewhat disappointed with his response.

Aren't men all impulsive beings? But why Larry is so different from them? Sigh.

"You thirsty? Let me grab you something."

"Okay."

Jessica wandered by the beach alone. Feeling bored, she bent down and picked up a seashell.

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She had not felt so relaxed for a very long time, especially after being cooped up in the hospital in the last couple of days. With the seashell in her hand, she started drawing on the sand while humming a happy tune.

“Ah!” All of a sudden, Jessica screamed, and that caught Larry’s attention.

Jessica squirmed on the sandy ground in discomfort and cradled her right foot.

Where’s Caspian? Larry ran toward Jessica. “What’s wrong?”

“I sprained my ankle,” Jessica answered softly, “But I’ll be fine. I just need to rest for a while.”

Larry could tell from her eyes that it was an accident. He knew she did not do it on purpose.

“Come, stand up. Let’s move to a safer spot before the tide comes in,” Larry said.

“I can’t,” she responded, “I can’t stand.”

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“Are you hurt?” Larry looked at the woman and asked.

“I think I have a cramp,” Jessica answered.

Nothing good has happened ever since I left the country.

“Come on.” Larry looked around and decided to carry her. “Is that a cut on your foot?”

“Yeah, I accidentally cut myself with a shard of glass.” There was a hint of helplessness in her voice.

Where on earth is Caspian? He should be here taking care of the woman he loves. Does he expect me, a married man, to do this on his behalf?

Jessica, on the other hand, was enjoying the moment.

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"Hey, there's something on your face," Jessica said.

But I just washed my face! A line formed between Larry's brows.

"Come, turn your face to me. I'll clean it for you." Jessica touched his face gently.

She then pulled herself closer to his cheek and gave him a kiss.

"Aw, what a loving couple!"

"I know right! They're both so gorgeous!"

A few tourists started praising Larry and Jessica as they thought they were a couple. Some of them even started snapping their pictures.

Larry was stunned for a moment, and he knitted his brows. Clearly, he was not pleased with what Jessica did.

Coincidentally, Caspian saw everything when he came back with the drinks. His heart sank immediately.

"I told you I'm not interested in you. I'm a family man, and I love my wife very much, so please watch your action," Larry warned icily as he tried to suppress his anger.

How he wished he could dump her by the beach. But since she was injured, he had no choice but to carry her to a safe spot.

"Why are you so obsessed with Joan? Am I not good for you? What can I do to make you love me? Tell me, and I'll do it," Jessica pouted and pleaded.

As if Larry would choose her over Joan if she could meet all his expectations.

"Joan and I are married, and she's my wife. You and I are just friends. Understand? If you don't wish to be my friend, you can cut ties with me," Larry said, "I'm sure you've heard how decisive I am. Once I've made up my mind, I'll not look back, so you better make up your mind now," Larry looked at her seriously.

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He wanted an answer from Jessica to put an end to this. He did not want Joan to get jealous again because of this kind of relationship. Larry was grateful that he could finally enjoy a peaceful life with Joan after getting rid of Gabriella. He did not need another woman to sabotage his marriage again.

"Let me think about it," Jessica said softly.

She could not give up her love for Larry immediately, yet at the same time, he would be mad at her if she continued to pursue him like this.

Jessica was crestfallen. Why does love have to be so complicated? I just want to be in love! Love itself was not complicated. Loving the wrong man was.

"Please take a look at her foot," Larry said to the doctor.

"It's you again?" The doctor looked up at Jessica with a scowl. "You need to start taking good care of yourself, young lady."

"And you." He turned around and looked at Larry. "It's your responsibility to take good care of your girlfriend."

But I'm not even her boyfriend!

Forget it. I don't have to explain myself.

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I'm only taking care of Jessica on behalf of Caspian. Speaking of which, where on earth is that man?

Larry took out his phone and called his number.

At that moment, Caspian was hiding in a corner, feeling utterly dejected.

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The woman he loved was all head over heels for Larry. No matter how hard he tried, his effort was all in vain.

Upon feeling the vibration of his phone in his office, Caspian gathered himself together and answered the call.

"Where are you? Come to the hospital right now. Jessica injured her foot. You should be taking care of her instead of running around!" Larry expressed his dismay.

Caspian knew Larry had his interests at heart, but what could he do? It was obvious that Jessica had her eyes on someone else.

"Got it. I'll be there in a minute," Caspian ended the call and ran to meet Larry.

All this while, he had been in hospital, but he just did not have the courage to see the two of them together.

"Where have you been? Quick, she's in the ward now." Larry walked up to him and gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder.

Meanwhile, Jessica, who was ashen-faced, was lying on the bed and flipping through a magazine.

"How's your foot?" Caspian asked.

"I'm fine. Don't worry." she gave a brief answer.

"I bought this for you. Would you..."

"No thanks. I don't feel like eating or drinking anything," she interrupted before Caspian could finish his sentence.

An awkward silence ensued. At that time, Larry had left the hospital to give them some private space.

"Do you like me?" Jessica stared at him and asked all of a sudden.

Caspian was struck dumb for a moment. He organized his thoughts and answered, "I..."

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"Do you like me?" she asked again.

How should I answer her when she asked me in such a direct manner? I'm not prepared at all!
Caspian started fidgeting and avoided having eye contact with her.

Upon seeing his expression, Jessica knew what his answer would be.

"Well, since you can't give me an answer, you listen to me carefully then," Jessica said steadily, "I've always liked Larry, and you know it. I don't care if he's married, and I don't care if he has a kid. I don't even care how people think of me."

"I hope you can help me get close with Larry," she continued.

How is that even possible? Nothing could ever break Larry and Joan apart!

"And I want you to know that I've always seen you as my brother," Jessica said this on purpose so that he could give up.

Oh. All right then... I can't force her to love me anyway. But there's no way she could win Larry's heart.

"I'm sorry, but I don't want to meddle in your relationship with Larry," Caspian responded, "And I want you to know that Larry and Joan love each other very much, and there's nothing you can do."

Larry and Joan had gone through thick and thin to be together. Caspian did not wish to see Jessica get in their way.

When Gabriella was around, she did everything she could to tear the couple apart. She even hoped to get rid of Joan. Just when Caspian thought things were turning around for Larry and Joan, Jessica appeared and tried to snatch Larry away. He could not help but feel sorry for the couple.

"Where there's a will, there's a way. I believe Larry will realize how good I am if I try harder. I'm sure he'll eventually be mine," Jessica smiled and said.

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What she said made sense, and I agree with her logic. But what she did was just not right.

The kind of stupid things women do when they're obsessed with love despite knowing that they would end up getting hurt. More often than not, they would only acknowledge their mistakes after losing their true selves.

Oh, well. She'll not listen to me anyway. Forget it.

"Good luck to you then," Caspian warned her, "But don't you dare harm Joan."

Though he liked this woman, he would not allow her to destroy Joan's life.

"Hey, how can you threaten me like this? I thought you like me? You should be on my side!" Jessica pouted and acted cute to get her demand met.

What? What logic is that? Why did she even say that? She and I are just friends. Our friendship is not even as close as the one I have with Joan!

All of a sudden, Caspian kept his guard up.

So all this while, she has been using me to do things for her?

I'll never do things to sabotage people's relationships. No way.

"Listen carefully, Jessica. I will not help you with this. You're on your own now," Caspian said and walked out of the ward.

Larry knew Caspian very well, and he knew Caspian would never betray him. Caspian might be a low-profile individual and was not exactly good-looking, but he was a loyal man. This was why Larry had always kept him by his side.

"She still likes you very much," Caspian walked toward Larry and said.

Larry was not surprised at all as he already knew what Jessica had in mind.

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“So what is she going to do?” Larry asked.

“She said she’ll work harder,” Caspian answered, “I believe she means she’ll try her best to win your love.”

This woman is really one of a kind. Too bad, I don’t have any feelings for her.

“Got it. Don’t worry, Joan and I will be fine. You know I won’t lay my eyes on any other women. I’ll still need your help in the future,” Larry said and gave his shoulder a gentle tap.

Caspian knew what Larry was implying. He did not turn him down.

Meanwhile, Joan sat in the garden with a line formed between her brows.

Why didn’t he call me? Is he really that busy? Can’t he send me a short text message and tell me what he is doing? Joan fidgeted with her phone and kept checking the screen to see if Larry called.

“What’s on your mind?” Delilah asked.

“Oh, you’re back, Ms. Young.” Joan was surprised to see her. “I thought you’d be taking care of Caiden in the hospital.”

“Caiden was discharged from the hospital yesterday, and you brought him home! What’s wrong with you? Something bad happened?” Delilah asked.

Nothing happened. I just miss Larry very much. Joan lowered her head, looking crestfallen.

Delilah finally figured out what she was so moody. “If you miss him, why don’t you give him a call? You can always take the initiative.”

Upon hearing that, Joan’s eyes brightened, but in just the blink of an eye, she got all emotional again.

Why should I call him? He should be texting me instead...

Nope! I’ll not text him. I’ll wait for him to text or call me!

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Just when she was deep in thought, her phone suddenly rang, taking her by surprise.

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Oh. It's not Larry. She let out a sigh and answered the call. "What's up, Caiden?"

"Can you cook for me, please?" Caiden asked.

What? What's wrong with him? He's a much better cook than I am, and he wants me to cook for him? Even if he doesn't wish to cook, he could have called for food delivery! What trick does he have up his sleeve this time?

"Let me order food delivery for you," she proposed.

When Joan was about to end the call, Caiden immediately stopped her. "Hey, don't. I just want you to cook for me. I miss your baked ribs," Caiden said.

Now that his Mom and Noelle had left, and no one knew where Jaden was, Caiden was all alone by himself. He had no choice but to call Joan for help.

"I'll cook first and bring it over later," Joan said.

"Why don't you come and cook at my place? I want to learn from you too," Caiden said.

Since no one took care of him after he got discharged from the hospital, Joan thought she might go and check him out. After bidding Delilah goodbye, she left the garden.

"You're finally here." Caiden got a little agitated.

Yes. I came because I'm a kind person. Joan brought a bag full of ingredients and walked to the kitchen.

"What else do you want to eat?" she asked loudly.

"I'll eat anything," he replied.

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Suddenly, he took out a camcorder and started recording, "All right. Joan. Tell me how you feel right now."

"Stop it. Let me cook in peace." She was annoyed.

"Come on, just say something," he insisted.

"You want to know how I feel? I just want to get this done and go home!" Joan looked into the camera and exclaimed.

Caiden continued teasing Joan for a while before heading to the living room to watch the footage repeatedly.

Not only she's pretty, but she's also a loving wife with a great personality. No wonder Larry doted on her.

Does she really have no feelings for me? How I wish I could win her heart! Caiden raised his head, looked at the woman in the kitchen, and wondered.

"Dinner's ready! Here, your favorite baked ribs. It's getting late. I've gotta go now. Bye!" Joan turned around and was ready to leave.

Is she gonna leave just like that? Why is she in a hurry?

"Hey, why don't you join me? I don't feel like eating this alone..." He blinked and pleaded with her.

Joan turned him down as she had no intention of spending time with him. "I need to go home. I have to help Ms. Young to take care of the garden. Goodbye!" Joan then started removing the apron.

"Hey!" Caiden exclaimed. He went up and stopped her from leaving.

Is she trying to avoid me? Am I a monster? Caiden knew she made up a random excuse, so she could get out of here, but he did not know why she did that.

"Eat with me, please. I'm feeling lonely," Caiden grabbed and shook her shoulders.

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Why is he behaving like a child? Joan could not stand him anymore. “But I really have to go home now. Lucius is gonna be home soon, and I have to go and get him some stationery.”

“I’ll go with you after dinner. I’m sure Lucius misses me as much as I miss him.”

What is wrong with this man? Can’t he tell I’m extremely annoyed and don’t want to be around him? And what if someone sees us together?

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“Okay, I’ll join you for a meal. But you’ll have to stay at home and rest after that, okay?” Joan’s question came off as a firm statement.

She was worried that someone might notice if Caiden went over to Delilah’s home and had too much fun with Lucius. Although the village was small and humble, there were still inevitably some gossip-seeking and rumor-spreading people.

“You really don’t want me to see Lucius, huh? Fine, we’ll put that aside for now. Let’s eat!” Caiden said as he nudged her into the dining room.

“This tastes really good!” He salivated excitedly at the freshly made dishes before him.

She made all this food for me, so they’re absolutely delicious.

The door suddenly creaked open—it was Jaden.

“Woah, that smells great!” Jaden said aloud.

His voice bubbled with laughter as he joked, “What a coincidence! How uncanny that I walked in right when you guys are eating. So tell me, did you guys specifically prepare these for me?”

Noelle peeked out from behind him and exclaimed, “Oh? And you’ve got someone else with you, a girl nonetheless!”

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Ugh! Why did those two show up now of all times? Caiden's lips twitched with annoyance. I finally got some alone time with Joan. Now, look at what they've done! They ruined everything. Are they doing it on purpose?

"What brings you guys here?" Caiden grunted.

Jaden frowned slightly at his rude question. What kind of a twisted joke is that? Why can't I be here? This is literally my home! Jaden paced into the dining room and smacked his lips like a starving child.

A playful smile curved on Jaden's face. He teased, "I thought I'd come home and spend time with you since I miss you so much."

The truth was that Caiden's mom had sent him over. She was worried for Caiden, who was just discharged from the hospital and had no one to care for him at home. And since she and Caiden had a strained mother-son relationship, she could only ask Jaden to go over and keep Caiden company.

"You spending time with me? What a load of rubbish. I'm grateful enough when you're not to pissing me off," Caiden complained straightforwardly.

Jaden won't go out of his way to keep me company unless there's something he's in it for.

"Caiden, you're eating so little! Does the food taste bad? I'll make some much yummiier dishes for you." Noelle then beelined for the kitchen.

"That won't be necessary," Caiden's voice thundered at her. "The food isn't the problem. I just lost my appetite now that you two are here."

Joan frowned for the briefest second before her features gradually softened.

What's with him? Wasn't he fine a moment ago? Why is he suddenly so upset? Is it because the two of them came back? But this is Jaden's home, though. And Noelle is his sister, so it should be fine for her to be here.

"Caiden... what's the meaning of this? Aren't you happy to see us?" Noelle asked in a shaky voice.

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Obviously, Caiden sneered inwardly. I'm well aware of what you did to Joan. The only thing holding me back from teaching you a lesson is that Joan isn't my woman. Otherwise...

"What do you guys want?" Caiden turned and asked in a growling tone.

What's up with him? Jaden raised a brow. What does he mean by "what do we want"? Why else would I come back to my home?

"What the hell is wrong with you today, Caiden? What's with the attitude?" Jaden snarled.

I literally just got home, and now I have to put up with your temper tantrum? Why should I? It's not like I owe you anything.

Now Jaden was really getting mad. They often joked around, but Jaden never paid two minds about how harsh Caiden's jokes were. Unfortunately, today, Jaden was in a bad mood and had no patience to deal with Caiden's offensive humor.

"Alrighty, let's get you back to your room so you can rest up." Noelle then shoved Jaden away to his bedroom before a fight could start.

With them gone, Joan and Caiden were the only ones left in the dining room. The air around them fogged up with awkwardness.

"Why were you suddenly upset earlier?" Isn't it normal for Jaden and his sister to come back here? It is his home after all..." Joan cautiously uttered.

It is normal. But I don't care because they irritatingly showed up and interrupted us! Caiden's eyes turned frosty as he slammed his cutlery onto the table.

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"Everything's fine. I'm going to the washroom, so don't wait up, okay?" Caiden said in a calm voice before getting up and leaving.

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What Joan didn't know was that Caiden's patience and tenderness were only for her. He could tolerate every single bad thing and every temper of Joan's, just not anyone else's. This was what Noelle jealously wanted but could never have.

Did I cross the line? Caiden turned on the tap and aggressively splattered water onto his face.

"Caiden, you've gone too far. My brother already had a rotten day, yet you were so rude instead of comforting him. Do you think that the world revolves around only you? That everyone's feelings don't matter except yours?" Noelle lectured without holding back.

She would always prioritize her brother's wellbeing over any other man, even if it were the man she liked.

Unnerved by her sudden anger, Caiden asked softly, "What happened?"

"I think he got ripped off by someone."

What? How could something like that happen to Jaden? Ugh. Forget it. I'll check on him later since he's probably taking a nap now.

"I see," Caiden acknowledged.

Then Noelle left Caiden to his devices as she wandered into the kitchen. There, she glared murderously at Joan, who had her back turned and was washing dishes in the kitchen.

"Why are you here? Didn't I tell you to stay away from Caiden? Don't forget that you're someone else's wife; you don't deserve to be with Caiden." Noelle threateningly bared her teeth whilst glaring daggers at her.

At this, Joan clenched her jaw. What's she blabbering about? Caiden forced me to come over and prepare a meal for him. How is any of this my fault?

"Ms. Ford. First of all, I was forced to be here. You can ask Caiden if you don't believe me. Go ahead, ask him if he called me over to cook him a meal," Joan challenged resolutely.

There was nothing more Joan loathed than being wrongfully accused without having the chance to explain herself. Noelle's words did just that, and Joan couldn't stand it.

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“Well, you could always refuse! He knows how to make his own meals,” Noelle stubbornly said.

What a joke, Joan snorted. If he could make his own meals, then why does he need me here? Can't she get it through that thick skull of hers? The man just got discharged from the hospital! He's obviously going to have a difficult time doing house chores, let alone go to the supermarket where he might potentially worsen his injury. If that happens, then who's to blame?

“Sure, I understand. Why don't you hold on to Caiden's phone and make sure he doesn't call me over again? I'm a very busy woman—I have to tend to the garden, care for my kid, and work at the supermarket. So please, I implore you to stay here and take care of him. Take this burden off my shoulders. Make sure he doesn't call me, okay?” Joan immediately left the kitchen.

She was truly offended.

What the hell? This is what I get for being kind? There's clearly nothing going on between Caiden and me. Yet, she keeps insisting otherwise. Ugh, Larry will get jealous if he finds out about this.

“I'm heading off now, Caiden! I've also put away the dishes for you,” Joan shouted.

“Wait up!” Caiden's voice grew closer as he catapulted towards her.

This made Joan spin on her heels. She blinked at him dubiously with a hint of curiosity in her eyes. What is he trying to do now? Can't we settle everything at once?

“Umm... could you come over tomorrow and cook for me again?” He mumbled with bright pink cheeks.

Huh? Joan's mind blanked as if she were hit by a bus.

Now he's just pushing his luck. Does he think everyone's lives are as leisurely as his?

Mmm-mmm, nope! At this rate, he'll be spoiled rotten.

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"I'm busy tomorrow, but Noelle is relatively free lately. She can come over and prepare your meals. Plus, you don't have to worry because she's a great cook," Joan explained whilst subtly winking at Noelle.

At this, Noelle immediately played along. "Oh, right! Caiden, her daily schedule is hectic enough. You really shouldn't trouble her all the time. I'll whip up a nice meal for you tomorrow, alright?"

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At least she's quick witted. For the briefest moment, Noelle's lips curled into a delighted grin at Joan.

"But I want you to cook for me... and I'm already used to the food you make," Caiden lowered his head and puffed his cheeks.

What the... Noelle was flabbergasted.

Since when was Caiden so childish? He's normally all indifferent and cold towards others. Why is he suddenly acting like a bashful schoolboy? He's even behaving so coquettishly!

"Please? I really like the food you make..." Caiden pouted and begged with a purring voice.

A shiver ran down Noelle's back. She stared narrowed-eyed in disbelief at this kittenish version of Caiden.

"Um... what's up with you? Can't you be more normal?" Noelle murmured awkwardly as she nudged Caiden's back.

In response, Caiden turned to face her with a darkened gaze. "Shut up!"

Yep, he's completely different with her than with me.

Noelle couldn't help but feel envious again.

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Wait... so he's extremely indifferent to everyone, no matter their gender—except towards Joan. He's only ever this gentle and affectionate towards Joan!

Has he lost his marbles? What the hell is he thinking? Joan has a family; she's got a husband and a kid! Won't it be messed up if Caiden goes after her?

Just as Noelle was deep in thought, Joan raised her voice and refused firmly, "I really do have plans tomorrow. I haven't been back to the supermarket in a while, and there's a lot of matters I have to attend to."

Joan mentally nodded at her firm rejection. This is for the best. Otherwise, he'll get too used to having me around.

Noelle then chimed in intentionally, "Joan's life doesn't just revolve around you, Caiden. Quit latching onto her! Do you think that she's a bachelor like you? You're forgetting; she has a husband and a child, as well as others she has to take care of. She's a really busy person!"

This damned girl! Why does she always have to be so blatantly honest? A hostile glint flashed in Caiden's dark gaze.

"You should go to your room and rest." Although Caiden said this in a soft voice, his face darkened furiously.

"I'm not tired," Noelle retorted. She boldly continued, "Besides, I'd rather watch the two of you work out this dilemma."

What is this damned girl doing? Why can't she be more considerate and give us some space?

Noelle clearly knew that Caiden wanted privacy with Joan. However, Noelle intentionally stayed because she wanted to prevent anything weird from happening between those two.

The three of them froze in hesitation for the longest while. At some point, Joan finally had enough as she picked up her phone and left.

"Why do you even like her? Is it because she's pretty? Has a good figure? Or is it because she's unique and outstanding?" Noelle questioned scrutinously as she plopped onto the sofa.

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"Because of her feminine charm," Caiden replied right away.

Noelle stilled in shock at his sudden, but resolute answer.

Did I hear that correctly? Has he never met a single woman with feminine charms in his entire life?

"Aren't I feminine?" Noelle batted her lashes at him.

Caiden abruptly cleared his throat. He averted Noelle's gaze and felt a rush of nervousness.

How can she compare herself to Joan? The two of them are completely different people.

"Well, I'm tired. Guess I'll call it a day now." With those parting words, Caiden took off for his room.

What kind of response is that? Noelle shot his distanced figure a dirty look.

Meanwhile, Joan had just made it back home with a massive frown on her face. She had been like that ever since she stepped foot into the house, which made Delilah suspect that something was wrong.

Delilah's face wrinkled with worry as she asked, "Is everything alright?"

"I'm fine, Ms. Young. Is everything in the garden sorted?" Joan dodged her question with a gentle voice.

She's worried about the garden even though she's down in the dumps? That silly girl. Always taking care of others...

"Ms. Young!" A man's voice suddenly called out from afar.

What is Dustin doing here? Confused, Joan shot onto her feet and headed toward the yard.

"Joan! You're home too," Dustin's voice bubbled cheerfully at her.

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He then turned to smile at Delilah. "Apologies, Ms. Young. I haven't had the time to come over and personally express my gratitude. Today, I finally freed up my schedule to visit, and to thank you for gifting us so many plants previously."

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Oh, so he's here to visit Ms. Young. Joan nodded to herself. She then turned around and paced towards her room, excusing herself from their conversation. Truthfully, Joan did so because she suddenly felt dead tired after everything that happened with Caiden and Noelle earlier.

Why do people misunderstand every single thing I do? One of these days, I might actually get so fed up that I'll ditch them all and travel the world. Who cares if they starve and can't make their own meals!

She stood and watched as the flower buds swayed to the blowing wind outside her window. Mixed emotions with an overarching sadness lingered in her chest.

Larry... when will you be back? Bleak-grey sorrow flitted in her eyes.

"What's going on?" Dustin pointed at Joan's room and asked in a lowered voice.

"I don't know. I've tried asking, but she won't say a word. She's been like this ever since she came home." Delilah raised her shoulders into a helpless shrug.

Something must have happened. Dustin's lips thinned with worry.

Larry's not home, so is it Caiden that's making her upset? He knew that Joan and Caiden had been awfully close these days, as well as the fact that Caiden had feelings for her.

"I'm going to check up on her," Dustin announced before approaching Joan's bedroom door and knocking on it.

Some time passed before Joan returned to her senses. When she did, the knocking startled her. She then darted to open the door.

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“What took you so long?” Dustin grumbled, pretending to be offended.

“No reason. Why? What’s the matter?” Joan awkwardly scratched the back of her head.

“Let’s go to the supermarket. There’s still a lot to be done there, and we need the extra hand. Plus, everyone misses you since you haven’t been there in a while.”

It has been a long time, Joan thought. I should probably go visit.

“Alright,” she agreed in a low voice before putting on a coat and heading out the door.

Awkwardness stifled them on the entire journey there. Not a single word was spoken between them. Dustin could tell that Joan was in a foul mood.

“Let take a quick meal break because I’m starving,” Dustin held her hand and suggested.

Huh? Joan frowned. What’s he playing at? Aren’t we heading to work? Not to mention, it’s an odd time of day to have a meal.

“No, but you—”

“I haven’t had breakfast yet,” Dustin interjected with a huff.

He is the department leader, so I suppose whatever he says goes. Besides, he’ll be responsible if anything bad suddenly happens at the supermarket.

Truthfully, everything was actually fine at the supermarket, and they didn’t need help either. Dustin only said that because he didn’t want Joan to be alone where she could potentially overthink.

Because aren’t all women the same when they’re left alone? They tend to overthink themselves into misery, or they reminisce about their past, and some even get depressed. Dustin nodded with certainty as he had witnessed far too many women succumb to this pattern.

“Is there anything you’d like to eat?” He chirped at Joan.

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The heck...? Wasn't he the one who wanted to eat? Why is he asking for my choice of food? Is there something bothering him? Joan scanned his face with a suspicious and unnerved look.

"I'm just asking you for suggestions since I don't know what I feel like having," Dustin added.

Alright then. Joan's gaze shifted around them to examine the options of eateries they had. There were no hotels in the village, nor any glamorous and high-end restaurants. This was what made the place serenely quiet.

"Come on, let's have something light." Joan led him towards a small restaurant down the street.

Once there, the restaurant owner dashed towards them with a bubbling passion. "Oh, Joan! You haven't come by here for ages. What have you been up to these days?"

"Wha-Oh, I haven't been eating out as much since I've been pretty occupied lately," Joan replied tensely.

The restaurant owner didn't push any further as she could tell that Joan was in a bad mood.

"Do you want to head over to the private rooms?" Dustin offered. "It's about lunchtime, and the crowds coming in can get real rowdy."

Joan glanced blankly at the clock on the wall before pacing towards the private room.

"Psst!" The restaurant owner subtly caught Dustin's attention. She asked in a quiet voice, "Why does she look so forlorn? Did someone mess with her?"

"Beats me. She's the kind of person to bottle up her emotions because she doesn't like troubling others. Anyways, I'm going to head over and find out now. Please excuse me." Dustin then grabbed a jug of water from the self-serve table and left for the private room.

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The restaurant owner couldn't help but feel concerned for Joan. Immediately after, she dialed a number that she had scribbled into her notebook.

At the same time, a haphazard series of clickety clacks sounded as Larry typed furiously before his computer.

"Hello?"

"Is this Mr. Larry?"

At this, Larry's brows tensed in displeasure. He couldn't tell where he had heard this voice before. Regardless, his attention remained mainly on the desktop screen before him.

"This is him. May I know who I'm speaking to?"

"Mr. Larry, I think you should come back and check up on Joan. She seems to be in an awful mood," the restaurant owner murmured into the phone.

Hearing this, Larry's fingers skidded to a halt. He straightened off his chair and calmly walked towards the balcony.

"What did she do?" His voice lowered seriously.

"Nothing! She's having a meal with Dustin, but she looks really sad."

She's with that man again? A slow flame burned within Larry.

Why is she always with other men? If she's not hanging out with Caiden, then she's always around Dustin... Am I not enough for her?

"I see. I'll head back after I wrap things up here. Thank you for informing me," Larry replied curtly before hanging up.

What's with that indifferent tone? The restaurant owner frowned. What does he mean by "he'll head back here after wrapping things up"? Does that mean he'll heartlessly abandon his wife if he doesn't manage to complete his work? What kind of logic is that? Are young people nowadays so easily angered? How petty and childish. The restaurant owner shook her head and gave a long sigh.

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Forget it. I've already done my part by telling him. What happens next is all up to them now.

"Miss, bring me some alcohol!" Joan's voice boomed from inside the private room.

"What are you doing, Joan? It's too early for alcoholic drinks! You should drink something lighter like juice." Dustin, who sat opposite her, thundered back.

"Ugh, I don't want juice... I want some alcohol! Miss, bring me some white wine! I want wine..." Joan whined whilst thrashing around like an upset child.

What the devil is going on with her? Why is she suddenly asking for wine? The restaurant owner's eyes narrowed as she curiously tip-toed outside the private room.

"Why are they doing this to me!" Fat tears rolled down Joan's face as she bawled, "I'm literally a plain nobody who's trying to live her normal life. Why can't they leave me alone? What did I ever do to offend them..."

This rendered Dustin speechless. He had no clue what happened to Joan, so a panicked urge surged in him as he witnessed her tear up so miserably.

"Why don't you tell me what happened, hmm?" A sharp pain flickered in Dustin's eyes as he soothed her.

She must be having a hard time without Larry, Dustin assumed.

But Joan's voice cut his thoughts off abruptly. She yelled, "Let me tell you this: I don't like Caiden that way. I've got enough on my plate already, yet he keeps asking me to help him with everything! While he did save my life, it's still unfair that he keeps asking me to cook his meals. It's outrageous, don't you agree? It's not like I'm his wife or anything. I have my own husband and child to tend to, but Caiden keeps latching onto me! And that Noelle won't stop calling me a shameless skank! She is hell-bent on the idea that I'm seducing Caiden even though I'm not. I'm really not! Ugh!"

So all of this is Caiden's doing! Realizing this, Dustin gaze darkened menacingly. He had always suspected that Caiden's motives were impure. Now, he knew for sure.

"Joan, you don't have to do anything if you don't want to. I'm sure that he'll still be fine without you. He's a man, after all. Nothing drastically bad will happen to him. Besides, he's

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got Noelle, doesn't he?" Dustin comforted her whilst delicately tucking a strand of her hair away.

"No, you're wrong! Don't you know... there's this thing called a guilty conscience? So no matter how much I loathe helping him, I have no choice but to do it because I don't want to owe him anything. Ugh!"

As the words left Joan's mouth, she suddenly bent over and heaved out a warm but rancid liquid.

At this, the restaurant owner frantically rushed into the private room. "What's going on in here? How did you get this drunk?"

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