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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2521 - 2530

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 2521

"You, get up right now!" A man pointed in Joan's direction and barked at her.

Fear and apprehension filled the woman's face as she crouched in the corner.

"What do you guys want?" She shouted in despair.

"What? Do you want to stay here? Get up and leave!" The man growled at her.

Where to? Are they dragging me somewhere where they would torture me? Joan hugged herself as she attempted to calm herself down.

"Go, quit messing around!" The man pushed her out of the room.

Bang! The door slammed shut behind her, and Joan found herself all alone.

Where did they go? Puzzled, she glanced at her surroundings. She noticed there was a reception. Joan dashed over there and picked up the phone to dial Larry's number.

"Larry! Please come pick me up! I'm scared!" She cried.

"Joan, don't cry. I'll come get you. Where are you?"

Larry was heartbroken to hear Joan cry. He could not bear to see the woman he loved suffer.

"I'm at the hotel. Hurry up and come pick me up!"

Larry dashed out of Della's place, got into his car, and stepped on the pedal toward the hotel.

He sped past countless red lights at breakneck speed, but no one stopped him. Larry had Caspian backing him up from behind.

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"Miss, are you alright? Did someone hurt you?" A hotel receptionist noticed Joan's disheveled manner and asked.

"Yes, someone kidnapped me," Joan replied right away.

"I'll call the police!"

"No, you can't!" Joan stopped the receptionist right away.

Not long after, a black car stopped right in front of the hotel entrance. Larry got off the car and dashed into the lobby.

"I'm here!" Joan waved her hands at the man.

"I'm so tired!" She leaned against Larry's chest and sobbed.

Larry hugged the woman tightly in his embrace as he carefully regarded her in his arms. He had sworn that he would protect the woman with all his might. However, all he ever did was let her suffer.

"Joan, I'm sorry. It's all my fault. Don't cry, okay?" Larry coaxed the woman as he pecked on her cheeks.

Joan was still in shock, and could not stop crying.

"Mister, here's a room key. You'd better bring her upstairs!" The receptionist who was just beside the duo said.

Larry carried Joan in his arms and took over the keys before heading upstairs.

He could not care less about going after the men who had kidnapped her as he only had eyes for Joan right then.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" Larry edged himself close to the woman's ears and asked.

"No," she replied in a soft voice.

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"What did they do to you?" He pressed on.

"Nothing. They just confined me in a dark room, but I was so scared," Joan sobbed.

Larry knew that the woman had always been afraid of the dark. She must have been scared out of her wits to stay alone in that dark room all alone.

"Don't worry, everything is alright now. It was my fault for not protecting you properly," Larry mumbled.

"Larry, let's get married," Joan said out of the blue.

The man lifted her chin and stared longingly into her eyes. She's finally saying yes!

"Joan, are you really saying yes?"

"Yes," said the woman as she nodded.

"But..." Joan hesitated for a moment.

"I hope we could get Della's blessing," she added.

Larry hesitated for a moment before agreeing to it. Given Della's personality, the woman was sensible enough to give them her blessings.

"Larry, are you finally marrying Joan?" Caspian asked aloud in the office.

"What's there to shout about? Have you been picking up bad habits from Jessica?" Larry glared at Caspian and said.

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"I'm just excited for you guys. When are you guys getting married?" Caspian asked.

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"We need to talk to Della first," Larry lifted his head and gazed out of the window.

They're the ones getting married. What does it have anything to do with Della? Bemused, Caspian cast a puzzled look at Larry.

"Joan has mentioned that she wants to get Della's blessing," Larry explained.

"That will be difficult. Ms. Duff has left."

"Where did she go?"

"Going back to her country, I guess," Caspian replied.

Larry thought Della was being really sensible. Her efforts in pursuing true love were in vain, and there was a limited chance that her career could flourish in Chanaea. The better option would be for her to head back to her hometown and thrive there.

"Ms. Duff is really heartbroken this time, but I think she handled it really well though," Caspian muttered.

Larry's words made a mark in Della's life, and let her see things from a fresh perspective. He essentially made her realize that no matter how much effort she was putting into the matter, Larry would not have a change of heart.

"She left you this before she left," Caspian said and handed over a little package to Larry.

He opened it, and there were photos of him and Della when they were overseas.

The photos were reminiscent of his time spent together with her; the joy and sorrow alike.

"Larry, there's a USB drive here!" Caspian shrieked.

"Hello, Larry. I guess when you're watching this, I'm already on the flight back to my country. I know you will be sad to part with me, but don't. I am really sorry for the thing that happened to Joan. I was being really rash..."

It was a short video recorded by Della. Although it was not lengthy, anyone who watched it would think that she had put a lot of thought and effort into it.

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"Larry, do you think you should call Ms. Duff?" Caspian suggested in a small voice.

"No, she will understand."

Larry heaved a sigh of relief, not because he was finally freed from her tenacity, but because the woman was finally matured enough to let go.

"Okay, keep it," Larry said.

"What are you guys watching? I want to watch too," Jessica caught sight of the two and asked.

"Why are you everywhere? Go away," Larry said bluntly.

He never felt the necessity to spare her any niceties. Besides, she was used to it anyway.

"Larry!" Jessica trotted along and hugged him.

Joan was bemused at Della's sudden departure. At the same time, however, the woman was relieved. Finally, she no longer needed to live in trepidation.

"Larry, why is Della leaving?" Joan asked when the couple was back in their place.

"I guess she doesn't see the point of staying here anymore," Larry answered.

It was not the answer Joan was looking for. Besides, Della was not an unreasonable woman.

"Did you say something to her?" The woman egged on.

"Yes, I made it clear to her that you're the only woman I love," Larry said as he pinched the woman's cheeks gently.

Joan's face beamed with delight at his reply.

"Then, when are we getting married?" Larry asked.

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“Who’s getting married to you?” Joan mocked as she tried to push him away.

“Hey, you can’t go back on your words. You actually proposed to me... Come here.” Larry pressed on.

Delilah was delighted to see the two all smiles again.

It was the happy ending that she was looking forward to. Delilah got up and made way to her bedroom.

Meanwhile, at Jessica’s end.

“Who are you? Why are you looking for me?” Jessica shrieked as she looked apprehensively at the man before her.

“Why? Don’t you recognize me anymore?” The man edged closer to her and grinned.

He knows me? Jessica widened her eyes as she tried to register the man’s face.

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He looked quite familiar, but she couldn’t seem to put her finger on where she had seen him before.

“Can’t remember? It seems like you’re a very forgetful person, Ms. Zimmer!” the man teased.

To jog her memory, the man continued, “The other day, you went to a bar with Joan Watts and got wasted. Later on...” he trailed off.

Jessica realized that she seemed to have a vague recollection of this. Tilting her head, she racked through her brains and tried to recall the details.

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Joan told me that I drank with some gang leader that day. And that he didn't do anything indecent to me... Could this man be him? Jessica eyed him with suspicion.

"Do you remember now?" he probed again.

"Yeah. Why are you looking for me?" she asked placidly.

The man shrugged nonchalantly. "No reason. I just wanted to see you. How are you, by the way?"

"I'm fine," came Jessica's terse reply.

"Allow me to officially introduce myself. My name is Jasper." The man extended his hand with a smile.

However, Jessica had no interest in befriending him. Ever since she started dating Caspian, she rarely interacted with the opposite sex.

"Uhm, I have to go now. I've got things to do." With that, she instinctively walked away.

"What? You think I'm not worthy of being your friend?" Jasper called out from behind.

If she wasn't dating Caspian, perhaps she would have no qualms befriending this man. The fact that he did not take advantage of her the other day proved that he wasn't a bad person.

"I'm quite busy these days, so I don't have time to make new friends. I'm really sorry," Jessica replied with a trace of guilt in her voice.

"How about I get straight to the point from now on?" Jasper quipped.

Jessica was stunned. Get straight to what point? What is he up to? She peeked at him, feeling slightly unsettled.

"Jessica, I'm gonna be frank with you. I like you," Jasper declared.

Caught off guard by his candor, Jessica felt slightly embarrassed.

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Clearing her throat awkwardly, she replied, "I'm sorry, but I have a boyfriend."

"It's okay. As long as you're not married, I still have a chance," Jasper countered.

Crap. Not another problem, please.

"Again, I'm sorry, but I love him very much," she explained calmly.

"That's because you didn't meet me earlier," Jasper said arrogantly.

This man doesn't know when to quit, does he? Jessica started to feel impatient.

"Fine. Since you're being so straightforward, I won't beat around the bush either. Caspian is the only man for me, whether in the past, present, or future, so kindly give up because you don't stand a chance," she articulated each word.

I've already made it so clear. He should get the hint, right?

"Love isn't eternal. You may love Caspian today, but who knows? You might fall in love with me tomorrow."

Jessica scoffed, feeling slightly helpless.

The chances of her falling in love with another man were next to zero. Since she had already chosen Caspian, naturally, it meant that she was ready to grow old with him. Regardless of who showed up midway, nothing could get in the way of their love.

"Jessica!" Caspian called out a short distance away.

"My boyfriend is here to pick me up. I'll get going now. Don't come looking for me again." After that, Jessica made a beeline for Caspian.

"Who was that?" Caspian raised his brows in question.

"Just a stranger asking for directions," Jessica answered simply.

Jasper exuded a murderous aura as he looked in the direction the two figures left.

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A few of his henchmen walked over, and one of them spat viciously, "Jasper, should we help you deal with that Caspian guy?"

"No, don't interfere. I can handle this myself," Jasper answered confidently.

Meanwhile, Caspian had doubts about Jessica's answer because he noticed the way that man had gazed at her.

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While munching an apple on the sofa, Caspian inquired, "That man from just now isn't your ex-boyfriend, is he?"

The next second, he let out a yelp when the woman threw a big pillow directly at his head.

"Ex-boyfriend? Who did you say was my ex-boyfriend?" she shouted, straddling the man to pinch his arm hard.

"Ow! Stop pinching me. It hurts. I was just joking, okay? Do you have to overreact?" Caspian begged.

"Don't ever joke about something like this again!" Jessica snapped, then got up from his lap.

"Where are you going? Let's stay like this. It's quite nice, no?" Caspian wrapped his arms tightly around her waist and said with a roguish smile.

"Nice my a**! Let me go. I have work to do, you know?"

At the mention of work, Caspian begrudgingly released the woman in his arms.

"Give me ten minutes." Jessica gave him a wink.

"Why don't you invite Caspian and Jessica over for a meal tomorrow?" Delilah suggested in the dining room.

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“Sure,” Larry agreed.

“Dad, I really miss Mr. Caspian and Ms. Zimmer,” Lucius chimed in.

“Alright, I’ll invite both of them over tomorrow, okay?” Larry replied gently while caressing the boy’s hair.

Larry had long since regarded Caspian and Jessica as his family, so there was nothing wrong with inviting them here for a meal. Delilah, on the other hand, wanted to express her gratitude to Caspian for helping Larry so much recently.

The next day, Delilah welcomed the guests while chiding, “There’s no need for all the formalities. We’re a family, after all. You really didn’t have to bring any gifts.”

“It’s no big deal, Ms. Young. What Caspian has is money,” Jessica joked.

“Larry pays my salary, so technically, he bought it himself,” Caspian replied awkwardly.

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the house became lively. With so many people around, Lucius was more excited than usual, happily climbing onto Caspian’s lap in the living room.

“Lucius, behave yourself in front of Mr. Caspian,” Joan chastised.

The boy pursed his lips and immediately got down from Caspian’s lap. Caspian chuckled and comforted him, “It’s fine, Lucius. You’re only a kid. Come here.”

“No. Mom said that children must have good manners. You’re my elder, so I have to respect you,” Lucius answered with a serious expression.

In an instant, everyone in the house erupted in laughter.

“I prepared all of your favorite food. Baked ribs, chicken wings, braised pork...” Delilah’s introduced all the dishes.

“Ms. Young, you’re the best! I love you to bits!” With that, Jessica starting eating.

Whenever she was in Delilah’s house, she would always let go of all her reservations. Hence, everyone had grown used to this.

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“Where are your manners?” Caspian nudged her from the side and reminded her.

“What’s wrong with my manners?” Jessica asked while chewing on a rib.

“You’re a guest. They’re the hosts!” Caspian elaborated.

Delilah walked out of the kitchen just then and differed, “What’s this talk about guests and hosts? We’re all family!”

“Wash your hands first!” Joan came over and smacked Jessica’s hand.

Both women were so familiar with each other they were practically sisters. Thus, even though Joan admonished her in front of the others, she wasn’t the least bit angry.

“Okay, okay. Don’t need to get all fierce on me.” Jessica pouted and hurried to the bathroom, all the while muttering under her breath.

This was how she always was. The sight of food would get her so excited that the basic common sense of washing hands before meals would slip her mind.

“Why isn’t Mr. Dustin here yet?” Lucius abruptly asked as he glanced at his watch.

All of a sudden, the house fell into pin-drop silence. “Lucius, what did you just say?” Joan asked anxiously.

“Mom, I think you should give Mr. Dustin a call.” Then, he murmured to himself, “Could he be caught in traffic?”

But the problem was, none of them invited Dustin over to the house. Joan blinked at the boy in front of her in confusion.

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“I invited Mr. Dustin here. Is there a problem?” Lucius tilted his head, perplexed.

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"It's no problem at all. Joan, quick. Give Dustin a call," Delilah urged.

Put in a tight spot, Joan looked between Lucius and Larry.

This boy. How could he just invite Dustin over without saying anything beforehand?

"No need. I'm here," Dustin announced just as he entered the house.

Stopping in the dining room, he praised after drawing in a deep breath, "The food smells amazing!"

"Why are you here?" Jessica questioned.

"What do you mean? Didn't you guys invite me over?" Dustin asked in return.

"Yeah. Didn't Grandma say to invite everyone for a meal together? So I called Mr. Dustin too," Lucius said innocently.

"Let's eat!" Larry abruptly barked.

"Let's eat, let's eat!" Delilah echoed, trying to diffuse the situation.

The initial happy and vibrant atmosphere was ruined by Dustin's arrival.

Everyone was seated around the dining table, but the air was thick with tension.

"What's wrong? Why is everyone acting so strangely?" Dustin broke the silence with a rueful look on his face.

"Everything seems fine to me," Lucius remarked.

Perhaps it was because Dustin took great care of Lucius in the past, that was why the latter had a good impression of him. Naturally, he felt it was a must to have him over during this gathering.

"Let's eat," Delilah urged again.

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And so, everyone bowed their heads and dug in. Not a single word was uttered throughout the entire dinner.

There were initially some after-dinner activities, but they were immediately canceled due to Dustin's attendance.

"Mom, didn't you say we were going to play games after dinner?" Lucius hugged Joan's legs and asked in an expectant tone.

"Be a good boy, Lucius. It's too late now. Mr. Caspian and Ms. Zimmer have to go home," Joan coaxed.

Caspian's heart ached when he noticed the disappointment in the boy's eyes. Bending down, he hoisted the boy into his arms.

"I'll play with you next time, okay? I promise." Caspian placed a gentle kiss on his forehead.

"Deal!" Lucius chirped happily.

Watching this scene, an odd glint appeared in Jessica's eyes.

On the way home, she glanced at him and raised the question that had been gnawing on her mind. "Do you like kids a lot?"

"Mm-hmm. I do," Caspian answered without giving it much thought.

"But Caspian..." Jessica looked him square in the eye and muttered, "You know that my career is really important to me, so I might not be able to give you children."

She knew that she needed to make things clear, lest she unwittingly offered him false hope.

"I never said I wanted you to give me children," Caspian replied.

"But I'm sure you'd want an heir."

Caspian reached over to curl an arm around her and reassured, "We can always go for adoption."

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Having said that, the two of them resumed chatting happily.

“Hey, if we really adopt a child, should the child have your last name or mine?” asked Caspian.

“Mine, of course!”

“Why? Children should always follow their father’s last name!”

Both of them started bickering again, all the way back to their home.

“I’ll take my leave now,” Dustin announced at the door.

“Bye, Mr. Dustin!” Lucius waved at him.

Larry was sitting on the sofa in the living room, exuding an imposing aura as he completely ignored the man bidding farewell at the door.

Lucius threw himself into Larry’s arms and asked curiously, “Dad, why didn’t you say goodbye to Mr. Dustin?”

Larry clucked his tongue and grumbled, “So many questions.”

How am I supposed to tell him that Dustin is my love rival?

“Lucius, it’s time for bed. You need to wake up early for school tomorrow,” Delilah urged.

Lucius peered at Larry for a moment longer before obeying Delilah, padding toward his room.

“What happened earlier is all my fault. I didn’t make things clear with Lucius, so he ended up calling Dustin over,” Delilah said guiltily.

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"It's okay, Ms. Young. It was just a meal anyway. Let's not dwell on it since it's already over," Joan consoled.

"Don't be mad anymore, okay? I know you're still thinking about what happened at the beach, but nothing happened between Dustin and I that night," Joan explained while stroking his arm comfortingly.

Larry pulled her into his embrace and whispered, "I know." Fortunately, their night ended on a pleasant note.

One day, when Joan was making her way back, a familiar voice sounded behind her, "Joan?"

Joan whipped her head toward the voice and was dumbstruck. Didn't he leave already? Why is he back again?

"Don't recognize me anymore?" Jake slowly approached her and touched her arm.

"Why are you back again?" Joan wrung her hands awkwardly.

The day he left, things started progressing in the direction that she wanted, but his return was a sign of imminent trouble.

"Why are you so dazed? What? Not happy to see me?" Jake prodded.

"No, that's not it. You're back because..." she trailed off, unsure of how to act around him.

"I wasn't fully prepared when I came here the last time, but now I am. Everything is set," the man answered, with an underlying meaning in his words.

"Oh, I see. Congratulations, then. Anyway, I have to go now." Joan took a step away.

Without warning, the man jerked her into his arms.

Joan's eyes widened in shock. "Jake, what the hell are you doing?" she demanded while struggling to break free from him.

"I missed you so much, Joan," Jake said in a hoarse voice as he caressed her hair.

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“Jake, let go of me!” Joan ordered.

“Let me hug you. Just for a while. Please.” The plea in his tone left Joan feeling helpless.

Even though she felt bad, she knew that a single hug could very likely evoke a multitude of problems.

“No!” With that, she shoved him away with everything she had.

Joan raised her voice. “Jake, you should know that even though my husband and I are divorced, we’re still together.”

So what? I don’t care! True love is unconditional.

“It’s alright. I can wait for you,” he insisted.

“But there’s no room left in my heart for anyone else besides Larry.”

Upon hearing this, Jake’s expression became frighteningly ominous.

Maybe I should give her some time since she doesn’t seem to understand me yet.

“Joan, please give me a chance. I’ll prove to you that I’m better than Larry.”

“I know that you’re a remarkable man, so you should find a girlfriend who’s compatible with you. I’m sorry, but I have to go now.” Joan turned and left.

Not far away, Dustin had witnessed the entire exchange.

Another love rival, I see. But the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Larry Norton, you’ll have your plate full soon enough. The corner of Dustin’s mouth quirked up, and he left in the other direction soon after.

“Larry, now that the company is back on track, you don’t have to work overtime so often anymore,” Caspian stated in a low voice.

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Some time ago, he had been so busy that he worked until midnight every day. At present, all the problems were resolved, so he could finally have some proper rest.

Larry answered, "I know."

"Now that you and Joan have finally gotten back together, should I book a flight somewhere nice for you two?" Caspian offered.

Larry understood Caspian's intention, but right then, he still wasn't completely comfortable with leaving the company to run on its own.

"Not now. Maybe some time later."

He had once promised to bring Joan on a vacation, but too many things had happened before he could. Thus, their trip had been delayed time and again.

Caspian studied Larry from a distance and shook his head in exasperation before leaving his office.

I guess Joan won't hold him responsible.

"Joan, your phone is ringing!" Delilah called out from the living room.

"Coming!" Joan yelled.

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"Joan, we're having a gathering today." A woman's excited voice drifted over the phone.

"What gathering? I'm busy." Joan frowned.

"I don't care. You must join us tonight!" The line went dead immediately after.

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What the heck? How often do they have gatherings? I really don't understand how these girls think. Can their monthly salaries even cover their three meals?

"What's wrong?" Delilah asked softly.

"There's a gathering," Joan replied feebly.

"You should go," Delilah encouraged. However, Joan didn't feel like going at all.

"Just go and don't overthink it. They probably want to celebrate Dustin's return tonight."

Joan pressed her lips together. Alright, then. After putting down the tool in her hand, she went directly to her room.

Should I inform Larry? Joan immediately snatched up her phone from the table and called him.

"The girls are throwing a welcoming party for Dustin tonight," she said cautiously.

"Go ahead," Larry replied curtly.

He agreed, just like that? Did I hear it wrongly? Joan could hardly believe her ears.

Larry seemed to sense her disbelief because he explained, "As long as you're not alone with Dustin."

The sky gradually darkened. After getting ready, Joan notified Delilah before leaving the house.

"Don't come back too late!" Delilah reminded from behind.

"Okay!" she promised.

Suddenly, Jake appeared out of nowhere and asked, "Where are you going?"

"W-What are you doing here?" Joan looked at him in surprise.

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"I'm here to pick you up," he answered as though it made sense.

For what? I don't recall making any plans with him. Joan surveyed the man in front of her with a doubtful expression.

"We're going to the movies," tapping on her forehead lightly, he said in a gentle voice as affection gleamed in his eyes.

"No, I'm going to a gathering," Joan rejected.

He never mentioned anything about going to the movies. Besides, even if he asked, I would've rejected him straight away.

He abruptly put an arm around her shoulders, and with his face only inches away from hers, he asked, "What? You don't want to hang out with me?"

This was the final straw. Shoving him away, Joan yelled, "Jake, please keep your hands to yourself!"

As though impervious to her words, Jake continued, "Then I'll attend the gathering with you."

Has this man lost his mind? What has gotten into him today? At that moment, anger coursed through Joan's veins.

She absolutely hated it when others kept bothering her, especially when they weren't that close with each other.

"Jake, you need to understand that we're just friends. You're not obligated to do anything with me, and neither will I allow you to do anything for me. Do you understand?" Joan declared solemnly, hoping that her words would get through to him.

Of course, Jake grasped her meaning. He was merely deceiving himself because he refused to let go of her, afraid that he might lose her for good.

"Why won't you just give me a chance?"

"Because I've already found the most important person in my life."

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Her answer was simple but convincing.

“Do I really have no chance at all?” he murmured.

“We can be friends.” Without waiting for an answer, she skirted around him and left. Jake stood rooted to the spot with his fists balled by his sides.

But I don't want to be friends!

We can either be lovers or strangers! There's no in between!

Previously, when I was in the hospital, I already had a good feeling about Joan. I admit, I only felt gratitude toward her in the beginning, but later on, I felt this bizarre feeling gradually taking over my heart. It was then that I realized- I'd fallen head over heels in love with her.

But she was already in love with that man, Larry Norton!

If she doesn't love me, fine. But I can't accept that she's in love with another man. If I can't have her, no one else can.

At the gathering, Dustin leaned by Joan's ear and asked softly, “Who was that man?”

“What man?” Joan feigned ignorance.

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“The man you met on the road.”

“He's just a regular friend,” replied Joan.

“Come, let's give Dustin a toast to welcome him back!” one of the girls declared with her glass raised.

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In an instant, the atmosphere turned lively. “Dustin, you left so abruptly, and came back when everyone least expected it too! What’s that all about? “

“Yeah, Dustin. Thank goodness I didn’t collapse from a heart attack, or you’d have to take responsibility for me!” hollered another girl.

Dustin chuckled, but ate his food without commenting.

There was nothing much to explain. He had left the country because of Joan. Similarly, he had returned because of her as well. He glanced sideways at the woman, who was chatting merrily with the others.

In truth, nothing else mattered except her happiness. Even if they could never be together, he would be happy as long as she was. Yet, for some unknown reason, he just couldn’t stomach the thought of her being with Larry.

Perhaps it was a man’s jealous streak at work, or perhaps he just had something against Larry. In short, every time he saw Larry beside her, a sense of extreme unease would overwhelm him.

“Dustin, why do you keep staring at Joan? Do you like her?” A tipsy girl pointed at him with narrowed eyes.

“What sort of question is that? Dustin has always liked Joan,” another girl chimed in.

In fact, most of the staff rooted for Joan and Dustin. Everyone could see that Dustin had genuine feelings for her, but she only had eyes for Larry.

“All of you better keep your mouths shut!” one of the women warned loudly. “Use your mouths to eat, not spout nonsense!”

This particular staff was the closest to Joan. Hence, she understood the latter the best.

She knew that Joan would never easily give up on her relationship with Larry no matter how serious the problem was.

“Alright, alright. Don’t be mad, okay?” The tipsy girl apologized in a whiny tone.

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“Enough talk about this. Let’s enjoy the meal. It’s my treat today,” Dustin gallantly announced.

With that, the party resumed.

The door was slammed open all of a sudden.

“Dustin!” A young and beautiful woman threw herself into Dustin’s arms, like a damsel in distress.

“What do you think you’re doing? Get up!” Dustin pushed her away while shooting nervous glances at Joan beside him. At that moment, he was filled with panic and exasperation.

“Dustin, I really missed you!” snuggling into his arms, the woman whined.

Suddenly, everyone was dumbfounded as they witnessed this scene. “What’s going on? Are they dating?”

“Impossible, right? There’s no way Dustin would fall for her.”

“Actually, she doesn’t look too shabby...” Subsequently, the staff engaged in an animated discussion.

“What nonsense are all of you talking about?” Dustin looked at them with a deep frown. With that, everyone stopped talking. However, it did not stop them from making speculations in their hearts.

But actions speak louder than words. Isn’t it obvious? The woman is blatantly flirting with him. Not to mention, he even comforted her.

Indeed, when the woman started crying, Dustin couldn’t bring himself to push her away anymore. Instead, he kept comforting her.

“Alright. Stop crying,” he murmured to her with a helpless expression.

What is she up to again? Dustin looked away, feeling distressed.

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I already kicked her out of the supermarket back then. Logically speaking, she should hate my guts. Why is she behaving like this?

The woman in his arms finally stopped crying. Raising her head, she gazed at Dustin with a pitiful expression and asked, "Why didn't you wait for me, Dustin?"

"What are you talking about?" Dustin gritted out.

"I was so sad when you left the country, so I went abroad to look for you, but it was like you vanished into thin air. I was so worried..." she said pitifully.

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"Whoa, who would've known, huh?"

"She's clearly lovestruck!"

"Dustin, why don't you just accept her?" A few girls began echoing similar sentiments.

"Shut up!" Dustin snapped.

Joan did not feel annoyed by this scene. Instead, she felt relieved for Dustin.

In life, it was already a blessing to be loved by another, and to her, love trumped fame and fortune. Joan flashed a smile at Dustin.

However, her smile was like a stab to his heart.

Shouldn't she be jealous? Why can't I detect any jealousy in her eyes? Dustin sighed softly, a wave of sadness washing over him.

"Dustin, can you be my boyfriend?" asked the woman.

For a woman, a confession like that required immense courage.

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Everyone released collective gasps and stared wide-eyed at Dustin as they waited for his answer with bated breath.

“First of all, there’s someone else I liked. And second, even if there isn’t, I still wouldn’t want you as my girlfriend,” Dustin replied briskly while sneaking furtive glances at Joan every now and then.

However, Joan did not once look at him. Instead, she had her head bowed as she trained her eyes on her phone, pretending not to know anything.

“Is it because of Joan? That someone else is Joan, isn’t it?” the woman demanded.

As on, everyone shifted their attention to Joan.

“It doesn’t matter who that someone else is. What matters is that I don’t like you,” came Dustin’s cruel answer.

“Alright, it’s getting late. Since we’re all done eating, it’s time to head home.” Once again, Joan’s closest friend came to the rescue.

“Yeah, we still need to work tomorrow. Let’s call it a night.”

“Joan, listen to me. It’s not what you think it is. There’s nothing going on between that woman and I,” Dustin explained while catching up to her.

What does it have to do with me? Joan ignored the man behind her and continued walking forward.

Is she mad? But she clearly wasn’t jealous earlier! Dustin was mystified as he tried to figure her out.

“Joan Watts!” he abruptly shouted. Finally, the woman stopped in her tracks.

“I’m really tired, Dustin. I need to go home and rest,” Joan yelled back impatiently.

“Are you mad about what happened?” the man questioned bluntly.

“Why would I be? I think the two of you are a great match,” Joan answered in an airy tone.

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"Aren't you jealous at all?" Dustin confronted her.

"Come on, Dustin. Jealous? I'm couldn't be happier for you. Besides, you're not Larry. Why would I be jealous?" With that, she spun around and proceeded forward.

"Don't you feel anything at all?" Dustin was undeterred.

"I do. I feel happy," she said with a wave of her hand.

At the gathering just now, she had one too many under the incitement of the other girls. Thus, she was feeling slightly woozy at the moment.

"You're drunk?" Dustin looked at her with a scowl on his face.

"No, I'm not. I'm just happy," Joan rebuked in a slurred voice and waved him away.

Under the influence of alcohol, she failed to realize that she was swaying on her feet while walking.

Seeing her unsteady gait, Dustin slow-jogged over to her and offered, "C'mon. I'll send you home." With that, he supported her.

"No. You need to stay away from me or Larry will be upset," she protested with a pout.

Larry again! Is that jerk all she can think about? Dustin clenched his fists as a menacing glint entered his eyes.

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Unable to contain himself, he grabbed her arms roughly and shouted, "Why must it be him?"

"Because I love him," failing to notice the anger radiating from him, she answered matter-of-factly with an unfocused gaze.

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“Then what about me? After so many years, haven’t you ever considered my feelings?”

“What the hell, Dustin? Why are you shouting at me? What did I ever do to you?” Joan complained as she thrashed against him.

“You’re right. It’s not your fault. I was the one who kept lying to myself,” Dustin hung his head and muttered.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you feeling sick? Do you want to go home and rest?” Joan abruptly held his face with a hint of worry in her glassy eyes.

“Can you accompany me?” he pleaded with a maelstrom of emotions swirling in his gaze.

“No, I wanna go home,” Joan insisted and turned around to leave.

Suddenly, she doubled over and threw up near a tree by the road.

Just how much did she drink? Dustin’s heart ached at the sight of her heaving her guts out like that.

“Are you okay? How are you feeling?” He instantly stepped forward to stroke her back in an attempt to ease her nausea.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry, I can go home on my own,” Joan stubbornly stated.

What nonsense is she saying? It’d be a miracle if she can even stand straight in her current state!

Without hesitation, Dustin crouched down in front of her and wrestled her onto his back.

“What are you doing? Put me down right now! What if someone sees us?” she exclaimed.

“Stop talking!” Dustin chided.

“Larry..., I wanna go home. I want my hubby...”

It grated on Dustin’s nerves every time she uttered Larry’s name.

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“Ow! You hit me!” Joan yelled on the bed.

“No, I didn’t. I only put you on the bed,” Dustin patiently explained.

“Water. I want water,” she murmured.

Dustin immediately went to pour her a glass of water and carefully held it to her lips. After taking only one sip, she flung out an arm and knocked the glass directly onto the floor.

Fortunately, it was only plain water. Otherwise, it would be difficult to clean off the wooden floor. Dustin looked at the woman on the bed with adoration in his eyes.

It would be more than enough for him if she could stay like this with him every day.

“Larry...” Joan mumbled while tugging on the blanket next to her.

Dustin quickly grabbed a piece of tissue to wipe the sweat off her forehead. Then, he helped her out of her coat so that she could sleep more comfortably.

His throat went dry at the sight of her ample bosom and he gulped.

No! Dustin, you can’t do that to Joan! He struggled to extinguish the desire blazing inside him.

“Mmm...”

Suddenly, Joan turned over and hugged him.

Her alluring scent invaded his senses, and with her lips were right next to his ear, he could clearly hear her breathing. Dustin felt himself losing control.

“Stay away from me, Joan!” he croaked out.

But the woman didn’t respond at all.

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After a long time, she flipped to her other side again, leaving Dustin feeling cold and lonely. But he was reluctant to leave this bed and overwhelmed with the urge to hug this woman to sleep even though he was aware that this was a selfish and dangerous thought.

In the end, he still slept beside Joan.

The next morning, the sun shone through the window and made everything appear peaceful.

The woman stirred in bed before slowly opening her eyes.

She stiffened all of a sudden. Where am I? This isn't home! It's not the hospital either!

She sat up in a flash and scanned her surroundings. Finally, her gaze landed on the man sleeping beside her.

Oh my God. Did I sleep on the same bed as Dustin? Nothing happened last night, right? She frantically lifted the blanket to look at herself. Other than her coat, she was still fully clothed. So this means we only slept on the same bed, right?

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