

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 86

It was supposed to be a grand party that day, yet it was ruined by someone putting up such a photo. Whether the purpose was to humiliate the Norton family or Vivian, the act itself was preposterous.

Mr. Zane nodded, "Yes. The culprit is the fiancée of your grandson, Ms. Miller."

Hearing the name of the culprit did not surprise elder Mr. Norton. Rather, he scoffed upon hearing that name, "As I've expected. I've suspected it since the beginning. That girl ain't no saint. She's a troublemaker."

Mr. Zane chipped in blankly, "Perhaps it has something to do with the relationship between Ms. William and your grandson back in their university days."

Nodding in admission, elder Mr. Norton sighed, "Both nephew and uncle ended up falling for the same woman. Us Norton family are to be blamed too for instigating such a thing."

"But Ms. William is the only lady that has attracted the attention of your second son. No matter what, I'm sure you will continue to support their relationship." Mr. Zane had been the confidant of elder Mr. Norton for many years and could obviously understand the latter's thoughts well.

"You're right." Rubbing his tired eyes, elder Mr. Norton continued, "As for that nuisance surnamed Miller, go and inform Fabian about her nefarious deed."

"Don't you want to personally deal with her?"

"Meh, a mere wildling? She's not worthy for me to personally make a move." Sneering, elder Mr. Norton pointed out, "If Fabian can't even manage his own woman, then he is not worthy to be a part of the Norton family."

"Yes, I understand." Acknowledging his orders, Mr. Zane left the study.

As elder Mr. Norton walked to his bedside, he looked out the window at the moon. His mind suddenly remembered the scene on the dance floor, where Finnick was actually smiling happily while dancing with Vivian. His wrinkled, frowning face softened.

How many years has it been... Since I last saw Finnick smiling like that?

I guess God answered my prayers to let Finnick meet a woman who can finally make him laugh again.

Right now, his only wish was for both of them to produce an offspring soon.

As elder Mr. Norton was worrying about them both, the amorous, fiery passion in the room upstairs had cooled off.

Finnick was sitting on his chair. Propping his head against his hand, his eyes were closed as he rested.

Even though it was late into the night, Vivian kept tossing and turning on the bed, unable to sleep. After a long silence, she meekly voiced out, "Finnick, I can't seem to sleep. Shall we have a chat?"

Finnick did not open his eyes, but replied nonchalantly, "What shall we talk about?"

"About that..." Vivian paused for a thought, then continued, "How does your grandpa... Know that both of us have not consummated our marriage?"

"Molly and Liam told him that," explained Finnick matter-of-factly. "After all, both of them are grandpa's people. Even though they said that they were sent by grandpa to take care of me, they're actually grandpa's informants."

Only then did Vivian understand why Finnick would always send Molly and them all away. It turned out that he knew of their purpose from the beginning.

Even though elder Mr. Norton simply wanted to keep an eye on him out of genuine concern, no one would like to be put under such constant surveillance, more so for Finnick who was trying to fool everyone that he was wheelchair-bound.

"Speaking of which..." Vivian hesitated for a moment before venturing, "Why don't you be honest with your grandpa and tell him that you're not disabled? I can feel that he cares for you very much."

Finnick opened his eyes and affirmed, "I know he cares for me a lot. After all, he is well advanced in age and is looking forward to enjoying quiet family life. However, because of that, there are some problems with his judgments."

Cocking her head in confusion, she asked curiously, "What judgments?"

"Judgments towards each member of the family." Finnick explained, "For example, he has always wanted Mark and I to get along well. Hence, if he finds out the truth about my legs, he may unwittingly disclose it to Mark."

Vivian was taken aback for a moment before she finally understood.

The reason why Finnick faked his disability is to fool Mark.

The relationships in a reputable and prominent family like the Nortons were just too complicated. Feeling a headache coming up, she groggily closed her eyes and tried to sleep.

While in that sleepy daze, she could vaguely see Finnick sitting at his desk, gazing at something in his hand.

Under the dim light, she saw the thing in his hand was shining and shimmering, just like a crystal pendant.

Is that the pendant from last time?

Amidst her state of semi-consciousness, she felt a little disturbed in her heart for no reason.

That pendant. Who does it belong to? Who is it that made him care so much for?

Whilst thinking in such a disoriented daze, she drifted off to sleep eventually.

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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 87

Compared with the peaceful silence in Vivian's room, the atmosphere on the other side of the Norton family's old mansion was much palpably tense.

Fabian walked into the room with a grim look. Ashley, who had already changed into her nightgown, went up to him in a hurry and hugged his arm. "Fabian, where have you been? I've been waiting for you for a long time after taking my shower."

She was clad specially in her silk lacy gown. Under the dim light, she appeared to be even more sensually seductive as she brushed her chest against his arm constantly.

Even with a beauty in his arms, Fabian stood there stoically unmoving as he stared at her gloomily, "Ashley, do you have anything you want to explain to me?"

Blinking with feigned innocence, she was perturbed by his straightforwardness. "Explain what? What's up with you, Fabian?"

"Those photos today." Seeing her pretending not to know what he was referring to, Fabian began to lose his patience. "Who allowed you to release those compromising photos of Vivian?"

Ashley turned pale immediately.

Does he know that I'm the culprit?

"Fabian... You... Perhaps you have misunderstood something?" She started to panic as she blabbered, "I don't know how those indecent photos of my sister suddenly come about, but you must believe..."

"Ashley Miler! How dare you! Still pretending at a time like this?" Cutting her off, Fabian could feel nothing but annoyance at the person currently in front of him. As his anger burned, he shoved her away and revealed, "Great Grandpa has already found out the truth! What do you think Great Grandpa would think about me after causing such a fiasco?"

What?

Even elder Mr. Norton knows?

Ashley's expression turned deathly pale.

She did not anticipate that in her fervor to frame Vivian, she had instead shot herself in the foot.

Gazing at Fabian in front of her, she knew then that he was her only bargaining chip. Her eyes quickly reddened as she pitifully tugged at his sleeves. "Fabian, I'm sorry. I truly am. I've been blinded by my own emotions, which led me to commit such an act. You won't leave me because of this, will you?"

As she pleaded, she let loose a few tears.

Undeniably, Ashley was indeed beautiful. The sight of her sobbing in sorrow, albeit feigned, was enough to invoke sympathy. In the end, she was still his girlfriend. Fabian felt his heart softened at the sight and toned down his anger. "Ashley, tell me. Why did you feel the need to do what you just did?"

Continuing with her act, she bit her lips and whispered, "Because I'm so afraid..."

"Afraid of what?"

"I'm afraid that you still have feelings for my sister. I'm afraid that you'll rekindle your relationship with her, and then... You'll abandon me..."

Fabian did not expect such a reply from her. Stunned for a while, he was at a loss. However, upon looking at her tear-stained smiling face, his heart ached. He reached out his arms and caught her in a tight embrace.

"What a fool," whispered Fabian to her ears. "After Vivian's repugnant scandal two years ago, do you think I'll still have anything to do with her?"

Upon hearing that, Ashley still felt conflicted, perhaps it was due to the many unsatisfactory things that had happened that day, even hearing Fabian's promise did not make her feel relieved, instead, it only aggravated what was within her heart.

"Fabian." Nestling in his arms, she could not help but asked, "If you had known that two years earlier... My sister... She did not actually do those things. Would you have reconciled with her?"

Deep inside her heart, this issue had always been the thorn in her flesh.

She had expected that as long as Fabian and Vivian were separated, the two of them would have nothing to do with one another and would move on as strangers. Life, after all, was not some TV drama where the protagonists would still long for one another.

However, that thought no longer gave her the confidence it used to.

She had not expected that Fabian would end up as Vivian's workplace superior. In some sort of twisted fate, Vivian ended up becoming Finnick's wife, making her Fabian's aunt.

Since discovering that Vivian was working under Fabian, she had been worried that Vivian would take the initiative to clarify what had actually transpired back then. Yet for some unknown reason, Vivian never made the move to explain. As puzzled as she was, Ashley was relieved as well.

However, this matter still nagged her so much that she was still worried.

Witnessing Fabian's attitude towards Vivian recently, Ashley could not shake the feeling that she had underestimated the relationship between those two. She was struck with panic, wondering if Fabian would seek to reunite with Vivian once more if he had learned of the truth about that particular incident years ago.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 88

Meanwhile, Fabian was momentarily stunned. He had not expected Ashley to utter those words, much less cared to question his feelings towards her. However, he quickly recovered and a cold look flashed across his face. "I've seen all the photos. What else can I misunderstand? What other explanations are there?"

Seeing his tense expression, she dared not say anything more.

Fabian observed the pitiful-looking woman in his arms, then suddenly remembered something. He frowned and questioned, "By the way, why and how did you end up with those photos?"

After all, those photos were sent to him by an anonymous contact through email. He had not shown them to anyone except for Finnick and Vivian. How did Ashley end up with those photos in the first place?

The question caught Ashley by surprise. She had been immersed in her worries, and initially thought that she had succeeded in changing the subject. Hearing his inquiry, her face paled once more.

Oh no! I almost forgot. I have yet to explain the origin of those blasted photos!

Noticing Ashley's face had turned white suddenly, something in Fabian clicked. Realizing slowly the suspected truth, he gently pulled her away from his arms. With his stern expression and his raised eyebrows, Fabian interrogated with a frown, "Ashley, are you the one who sent me those photos?"

Ashley could not help but clench her fingers tightly. She knew that she was now in hot waters.

In fact, just a few days ago, when she first learned that Vivian was married to Finnick, her mind was so full of unjustified anger that she made up the plan on the spot to sabotage her without any careful planning nor afterthought.

Moreover, she was originally so confident in her plan. She even bribed a servant of the Norton family to help out in her plot. After the grand party, she arranged for the servant to resign and leave, hence tying up any loose ends and made sure that her whole plot was air-tight from being exposed.

Despite doing all that, she had undoubtedly underestimated the influence of the illustrious Norton family. With their power and efficiency, the investigation had proceeded much faster than she anticipated. That very night, she had been exposed.

As such, she had not come up with an excuse in time to explain the origin of those photos.

The moment she heard Fabian's question, it made her flabbergasted. Her mind plunged into a state of disarray and she wished she were anywhere but here right now.

Indeed, whether it was the incident from two years ago or the recent case, the photos in Fabian's possession were sent by her personally.

Because the scheme two years ago was all planned by her. Even the pinhole camera which snapped those photos was placed by her in the hotel as well.

Of course, Fabian must never know about all these.

While trying to calm herself down in the fastest possible time, an idea suddenly hit her. Her spirit was lit up with inspiration, along with her confidence.

Deliberately pretending to be frightened, she quivered, "Fabian, if I reveal to you how I have gotten hold of these photos, will you blame me?"

Eyeing her suspiciously with narrowing eyes, he frowned, "Just tell me first, where do you get the photos?"

Ashley purposely avoided his piercing stare and with a stuttering voice, she whispered, "A-Actually... I found them in your phone while browsing through it secretly."

With a sullen face, he stared at her warily, trying to spot any tell-tale signs of lying. After all, he had not expected such an explanation from her and could not help but be stunned by it.

"You looked through my phone?"

"Yeah." Gaining momentum, she plucked up her courage and continued, "Do you remember that we were in a restaurant that day? I remembered that you were acting very abnormally. I suspected you might have another lover out there. I was scared, you know. Hence, when the chance arose, I flipped through your phone and saw your email app. Inside your inbox, there was an anonymous email. I clicked on it and saw its content... I didn't expect to see such a thing. Perhaps I was too overcome with shock that I instinctively forwarded the email to my own cell phone."

Meanwhile, Fabian's face was furrowed, trying hard to recall the event.

He remembered in the few days after he had received the anonymous email, he had indeed had a meal with Ashley. He had been preoccupied and worried the whole time because of Vivian's scandalous photos.

Could things be so straightforward after all?

Looking down at Ashley beside him, he saw that her eyes were red. She looked pitiful like a helpless little rabbit. The sight of her in such a state triggered a sudden feeling of sympathy in him.

Deciding to trust her, he gave in, "Okay, I understand." Further patting her on her shoulder reassuringly, he joked, "Don't give me that kind of look anymore as if I'm the one bullying you."

Ashley bit her lips in anticipation and glanced at him cautiously, "Fabian, you don't blame me anymore?"

Blame you?

Of course I blame you.

Especially when I remember the look in Vivian's eyes the moment the compromising photos are released. In fact, he was so outraged back then that he wanted to break off the engagement with Ashley there and then.

And yet, seeing Ashley's eyes which bore much resemblance to Vivian's, he could not bring himself to do it.

Indeed, since his return, he had been too concerned with Vivian's affairs and had outright neglected Ashley. It was no wonder that the latter had felt no sense of security regarding their relationship.

In the end, he could sense that Ashley had done this due to her love for him.

Fabian's eyes lit up suddenly.

If only...

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 89

If only Vivian would have loved me as madly as Ashley does, to the point where she's willing to do anything and everything for me... How great would that be...

Sighing to himself, Fabian quickly shook his head to snap off from his daydreaming. "I'll let it pass this time. In the future, don't do anything reckless without discussing with me first, okay?"

Hearing that he had let her off the hook, an expression of relief and joy flashed over Ashley's face. Hugging him, she promised, "Of course! I won't do it again! I promise! Fabian dear, you're really good to me."

As she gazed at the man in front of her, a flicker flared in her eyes as she straightened up suddenly. Looking at him alluringly, coupled with a seductive voice, she spoke bewitchingly, "Fabian, ever since you've returned, it's been a long while since we last had that..."

Fabian was rendered speechless.

With the bedroom only lit by the bedside lamps, the surrounding was dim and the atmosphere was beginning to be filled with a certain anticipation. In the dimness, Ashley's face involuntarily overlapped with a familiar face in his memory.

Just then, Ashley took the initiative to close the gap between them. Her red lips pressed closer as her body slowly rubbed enchantingly against him. He could feel her soft curves against his skin as she moaned, "Fabian... I really want you..."

The moment Ashley approached, the strong scent of her body whiffed past his nose.

Such bodily fragrance, however, woke him up from a trance, as if a pail of cold water were splashed onto him.

"No." Sternly, he mouthed that single word and pushed Ashley away.

Staggering back after being pushed, she looked at him in disbelief. Her feelings were clearly hurt as she called out, "Fabian..."

Surprised at what he had just done while simultaneously at a loss of how to face her, he could only manage to utter, "I'm too tired today. What about another day?"

Ashley became upset. Not able to find any words to say, she resorted to biting her lips in frustration and nodded in resignation.

Fabian quickly got himself ready for a shower. Yet before he entered the bathroom, he could not help but turn towards the stupefied woman. Seeing Ashley in her disconcerted daze, he could not resist adding more salt to the wound, "Ashley dear, the perfume you wear is too pungent. Don't use it anymore. I don't like it."

The moment he finished uttering those words, he entered the bathroom without waiting for her response or a look back.

Ashley was left rooted to her spot, her pale face palpable in the dim light as if her body were devoid of any soul.

She was rejected by Fabian. Again.

Ever since his return, she had taken the initiative countless times, trying to push herself onto him. However, every attempt had fallen flat as each time Fabian would shot her down. Not only that, but he had also not spent much time with her. Instead, most of the time, he was at his magazine company.

That magazine company with Vivian in it.

And now, he still dared to remark that my perfume was too pungent? Such obvious spite. Such a condescending attitude!

When they had first gotten together, he clearly stated that he liked this perfume scent the most. Due to that, she had always painstakingly put it on – be it daytime or nighttime after a bath.

Yet now he admitted that it would be best for me not to wear any perfume?

In this day and age, how many girls would not wear perfumes?

Except for that poor, unstylish Vivian perhaps!

Vivian William...

As the name popped into her mind, Ashley suddenly turned pale and shuddered.

Am I thinking too much again? That Fabian... Perhaps he was still unable to forget and let go of Vivian!

Her anger suddenly boiled once again and almost exploded. She thrashed the pillows and blanket on the bed, making a mess.

Vivian!

You shameless b*tch!

You're just a mere peon from a poor, menial family. What gives you the right to wrest my man away from me!

You're the one who forced me little by little, step by step into this predicament! So don't blame me for being merciless from now on!

Taking out her phone in anger after making sure Fabian was still in the bathroom, she dialed a number only she knew.

"Hey." As soon as the phone was connected, she spoke with a low, cold tone. "Find me that old man from back then. Tell him that I need a favor from him. If he's willing to help, I'll find him several beautiful, blooming girls to entertain him. Complimentary of course, courtesy of yours truly."

Early next morning.

When Vivian woke up, Finnick had already freshened up and was standing in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirror, buttoning his shirt.

Most of the buttons were still unbuttoned, revealing his solid, stony chest with distinct muscle lines. It was a truly chiseled masterpiece sight to behold, achieved through hard hustling and diligent discipline.

Vivian had not expected her eyes to be blessed at such early hours in the morning. She could not help but gawk at such a fine specimen of a husband.

Noticing her blank stare reflected by the mirror, Finnick tried his best to hide his grin. With a hidden smirk and a low, manly voice, he growled gently, "So... Are you satisfied with this body?"

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 90

Hearing his remark, Vivian was jolted out from her trance. Blinking in confusion, she remembered his question regarding his body.

She blushed immediately and looked away quickly.

Seeing his lady in discomfort and closing her eyes, Finnick raised his brows and wondered about his next move.

Leaving his shirt unbuttoned, he walked over to Vivian who was averting her gaze. He leaned down and squeezed her chin, forcing her eyes to focus on him again.

“Vivian,” he whispered in a low, manly voice. “Just watch all you want. I promise I won’t charge you.”

She widened her eyes in disbelief.

Is it my imagination? Or is Finnick getting more and more shameless with each passing minute?

Such a thick-skinned man. She could never hope to match that level of shameless confidence in her lifetime. With her face turning redder, she was forced to gaze at his exposed firm chest in front of her.

Fearing Finnick would see her nervousness, she hastily changed the subject. “Um... What do you think? Will your grandpa know that we did not do ‘that’ last night?”

Raising his eyebrows, Finnick leaned back a little and shrugged, “Maybe. But so what?”

“So...” Being so close with him made Vivian more flustered. Words just came out of her mouth without going through her brain, “Do you think we’ll be scolded for not...”

Finnick raised his eyebrows even higher, “Vivian, what are you trying to imply, hmm?”

Realization dawned on Vivian on what her words sounded like and she felt like committing suicide.

I’m such a fool for mentioning that! I’ve just trapped myself!

“I... I don’t mean that...” She stuttered as she tried to explain away, fearing that Finnick would misunderstand.

Chuckling lightly, he ventured, "Then pray tell what you mean? Perhaps you can enlighten me?" As he enunciated every word naughtily, his breath blew onto the tip of Vivian's nose. "Don't you know that men have certain needs upon waking up in the mornings?"

Vivian's face was now red as a tomato as she stammered even more. "I-I, I'm really not..."

Initially, Finnick meant it all as a joke, but he did not expect his little lady in front of him to take it seriously. Seeing her flustered, flabbergasted face, a corner of his lips curved upward into a smirk.

"I'm just kidding," whispered Finnick into her ears. She heard him, but before she could heave a sigh of relief, the second part of his sentence made her break into a nervous sweat. "However, your valid concern is duly noted. Since there's a truth to your matter, we'd better do something about it."

"Huh?" Vivian was at a loss for words. Before she could ask what Finnick was thinking of doing, he suddenly leaned down and buried his head between her beautiful neck.

"Ah!" Vivian was taken aback and tried to struggle, but Finnick had foreseen that, hence he clasped both her hands together and pressed her whole body into the bed. Unable to move, she faltered, "F-Finnick... What are you... What are you doing?"

A moist and itchy sensation crept between her neck. She could feel his lips working their way around, nibbling and sucking, while his warm breath was brushing her neck. Vivian was frightened and wanted to yell out, but as the tingling, sensual sensation spread all over her body, she could not help but shudder slightly in a weird state of confused pleasure.

After a long while, Finnick straightened up slowly, a corner of his mouth raised up in a satisfied smirk. He could not take his eyes away from the red mark on Vivian's beautiful neck.

Feeling none of the embarrassment the blushing lady in front of him was experiencing, he whispered, "This will suffice, I guess."

As part of her reaction, she quickly pushed Finnick away, jumped out from the bed, and rushed to the mirror next to her.

Scrutinizing herself in the mirror, she was stunned by what she saw.

She could see that her face was flushed, and her eyes were sparkling. There was something unfamiliar yet charming in her gaze.

Is this... Is this really me?

However all these were not the most important.

The one thing that caught her eyes was the obvious hickey on her neck.

"Finnick Norton!" She could not help but feel annoyed. "You... How do you expect me to go out and meet other people looking like this!"

Calmly pacing up to her, Finnick wrapped his strong arms around her lovingly from behind and chuckled, "I'm merely leaving my mark on you."