

# Never Late, Never Away Chapter 271

Along the bustling streets, Vivian anxiously tried to flag a cab down. Sadly, none stopped for her.

Her panic grew – she was going to be late for her grandfather’s birthday party if this predicament continued.

She tried calling Finnick, hoping that he could give her a ride. Unfortunately, the line just could not get through.

What on earth is he doing? Does he not know that I’m going to the birthday party?

Finnick’s lack of response only compounded her misery.

While she was sulking along the walkway, Fabian walked out of the mall. A gift bag hung from his fingers.

Vivian’s desperate figure quickly caught his eye. “Vivian? Why are you here?”

Observing the gift bag in her hands, Fabian guessed, “Where are you heading to? The Norton Residence?”

Vivian likewise noticed Fabian’s gift bag and chuckled. “What a coincidence! You’re heading there too? Is that a gift?”

“Yeah, the old man suddenly called and announced that he’s holding a birthday party. This sort of thing only happens once in a blue moon.” Guessing that Vivian could not get a ride, he added, “Let’s go together – I’ll bring you there.”

Vivian hesitated – it seemed a little unbecoming of her status to accept his offer. “It’s alright, I’ll get my own cab.”

Glancing at his watch, Fabian replied teasingly, “You’re never going to get a cab at this hour. Just come with me – it’s not like I’m going to bully you or anything.”

Giggling at his comment, Vivian figured that making the elder Mr. Norton unhappy by being late was a much more undesirable scenario. "Okay then, let's go."

The two entered the car.

The peak hour was unforgiving. The roads were jammed and the pair found themselves stuck behind multiple red lights. To lighten the mood, Fabian switched on the radio. Coincidentally, the station was playing a song that was popular during their college years.

"Hey, do you remember this song? Back then, there was a guy from our course who sang this song during a gala dinner to woo a girl. But his performance was horrendous – I'm not sure if he sang anything in tune."

Fond memories came rushing back to Vivian. Her lips curled naturally as she replied, "Ah yes, I remember that whole fiasco. The best part of the story is that the girl was actually so touched by his act that they got together! We always mused back then that fortune truly favored the fools."

University life tended to be full of interesting and silly happenings. Some people had such a memorable time that they had enough tales to retell for an entire lifetime.

These past memories threw Vivian into a trance. But she quickly snapped out of it, realizing that this conversation was a little too inappropriate. Changing the topic, she asked, "Anyway, do you know why Grandpa suddenly wanted to host a meal? It's such short notice... I thought his birthday party would have been in preparation since a few months back."

Fabian explained, "Great Grandpa doesn't really like anything that's too extravagant. Moreover, his birthday happens to be Great Grandma's death anniversary too. Therefore, he's usually reluctant to celebrate his birthday. We assumed that this year would be the same, which was why we didn't prepare anything beforehand. But to our surprise, he said he wants a party all of a sudden. It threw all of us off guard."

This explanation clarified many things for Vivian.

But it also ended the conversation. Vivian fell into silence, and the pair carried on with the journey in awkwardness.

After what seemed like forever, the Norton Residence came finally in sight. They alighted at the villa's entrance.

However, the massager Vivian was carrying was too bulky for her figure. Due to slight carelessness, Vivian found herself losing her balance. Luckily, Fabian swiftly came to her aid and held her back from falling.

"T-Thank you." She muttered before pulling away from his arm wordlessly.

But to her surprise, Fabian suddenly tightened his hold on her.

Vivian furrowed her brows in confusion. Just when she was about to protest, a black Bentley pulled into the driveway. The two froze as the car door opened.

From the vehicle, a wheelchair emerged. Beside it stood Ashley.

Vivian was struck dumb. Her face paled.

Finnick, who has been uncontactable for the whole day, is with Ashley?

The other three similarly had a look of disbelief. They never expected to meet each other in such a manner.

The whole party stood rooted to their spots. Varying sentiments stirred amongst the four.

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The situation was at a standstill. They looked at each other in silence.

Vivian's icy gaze did not escape Finnick.

Meanwhile, Ashley was green with jealousy upon seeing Vivian and Fabian together.

Why?

Why are they together again?

But she soon noticed a similar look of jealousy on Vivian's face and felt a sense of accomplishment.

Ha.

Now you know how I feel when I see you and Fabian together. It's your turn to suffer – let's see how you're going to tolerate the sight of me hanging out with Finnick. Weren't you so proud to call him your husband? Well, too bad.

Ashley put on the most enchanting smile she could and leaned closer to Finnick. With a purposefully sweet voice, she said, "Ah Vivian, you're here."

Finnick was oblivious to Ashley's intrusion into his personal space. Instead, all of his attention was fixated on the pair before him.

What the hell?

Why is Vivian with her ex? And why do they look chummier than ever? How dare she!

Finnick was livid.

"Come over," he instructed Vivian. Fury was discernible in his tone.

Vivian frowned and refused to budge.

Aren't you with Ashley too? What right do you have to be angry at me?

Realizing that no one was paying attention to her, Ashley shot a glare at Vivian and strode to Fabian's side. Slotting her arm into her lover's, she said to the man, "The gift's ready? If so, then let's go in."

Fabian looked back worryingly at Vivian, but there was nothing he could do.

The duo disappeared into the house, leaving behind Vivian and Finnick.

"If you're angry at me, just remember that I haven't said anything about you being with Ashley yet."

“Whatever. Just swear that you’ll never be with Fabian alone again.” Finnick insisted.

Vivian was not ready to concede. Seeing Finnick and Ashley together made her bitter enough. Worst still, of all people he could be with, it had to be Ashley – the source of her emotional torment since childhood.

Thus, although Vivian knew she was being stubborn, she could not agree to Finnick’s request. You didn’t give me an explanation as to why you’re with Ashley either.

“Fabian and I met along the street by sheer coincidence today. In addition, we’re colleagues, so it’s impossible for us to never meet each other. There’s absolutely nothing between us. If you can’t believe that, it’s your problem.”

Finnick was already ticked off at how intimate Vivian and Fabian looked. Her argument only fueled his anger.

The atmosphere was tense.

But on the account that it was the elder Mr. Norton’s birthday, Finnick decided to turn a blind eye for now. “Let’s just head in first.”

Vivian nodded, and the two entered the villa.

The elder Mr. Norton stood out in his red outfit. The bright hues made him look particularly sprightly. His exuberance grew upon seeing Finnick and Vivian.

“What took you two so long? Come over here and let me take a good look at you.”

The villa was full of life. The whole Norton family was here, filling every corner of the house.

Finnick was regarded with esteem the moment he entered. The same could not be said for Vivian, however. Instead, she was greeted with unsolicited gossips about her and her younger sister. The news was still fresh on everyone’s minds after all.

It did not matter whether the situation had been rectified, or that the commotion around Ashley had already ceased. Seeing the two ladies appear at the same venue was still astonishing enough for it to become a hot topic amongst the people present.

The elder Mr. Norton turned a blind eye to the ruckus. Instead, he looked dotingly at Vivian and commented on how she looked a little frazzled. "Finnick, you ought to take better care of her."

The couple forced a smile.

Mark, who had been listening to the conversation on the side, interjected with an empty laugh. "Grandpa, don't you dislike celebrating your birthday? What's with the special occasion this year? You seem very delighted today."

The elder Mr. Norton was all smiles when he replied, "Well, I'm elated that our family has many new members this year. I figured that having a party to celebrate that would be good." After a slight pause, he added, "Alright, I think it's time to start the show."

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The party went on smoothly. The big and gorgeous cake dazzled many when it made its appearance.

Everyone sang the birthday song in unison, and the elder Mr. Norton was grinning from ear to ear throughout.

Overall, it was an happy occasion for all except for Mark. When the party settled down for a meal, he watched Finnick and Vivian with hawk eyes throughout. It was as if he was trying to read into something.

Meanwhile, Ashley was assigned to a prominent seat at the table. She also got showered with affection from Mr. Norton, who personally fetched her food and asked if it suited her tastes. "Now that you're pregnant, it's important to watch your diet."

Ever since it was announced that Ashley was pregnant, the elder Mr. Norton's attitude towards her improved drastically.

After all, he was very protective of this future heir and grandchild. During the meal, Vivian's thoughts drifted to Mark, who continued to observe them.

It was finally clear to her why Mark targeted Finnick back then, and why Finnick had to pretend to be handicapped. Finnick's command of authority was simply too threatening for the man.

Now that Vivian knew Mark was the culprit, the sight of him deeply unnerved her.

The man had an air of wickedness, yet his mind was unreadable.

Following the meal came the time to offer presents.

Mark presented an expensive wristwatch to the elder Mr. Norton proudly. Its intricate design indicated skilled craftsmanship.

Everyone looked on with awe, praising Mark for his generous gift. What a good son, they thought.

But the elder Mr. Norton was barely impressed. After taking a glance, he expressed nothing more but a short word of thanks.

Finnick presented his gift next.

It was an elegant rosewood box with exquisite carvings – a prized artifact with hundreds of years of history.

Finnick knew that Mr. Norton was a fan of antiques. As such, he specially procured the present through an auction overseas. It was meant to be a New Year's gift, but the sudden birthday occasion meant the gift made it to the old man's hands earlier than planned.

The elder Mr. Norton was more than pleased. Admiring the gift, he beamed. "You really know the way to my heart. The price aside, the box's elaborate design is one fit for royalty. This is a great gift."

The disparity in Mr. Norton's reactions aggrieved Mark. But being the master of disguise, none of his resentment showed through externally.

The next gift was from Fabian and Ashley.

Brimming with joy, Mr. Norton thanked them for their efforts. "But I must say, the biggest gift you've given me is this little life right here. Thank you for continuing the Norton family's bloodline." He eagerly gestured toward Ashley's belly.

His words unknowingly accelerated Ashley's heartbeat.

Overall, everyone offered lavish gifts thus far.

Vivian could not help but feel ashamed of her own present. It was insignificantly inferior as compared to all the other gifts.

Out of nowhere, she felt Finnick's hand on her. She did not realize when the man had moved beside her. His palm was colder than expected.

But she shrugged it off out of spite.

"Vivian, I look forward to your gift. What do you have for me?" The elder Mr. Norton enquired.

Vivian pursed her lips nervously. There was no wiggling out of this situation – she could only gather her mental fortitude and present the gift. Oh well, I'm already used to snide remarks and judgmental stares anyway.

A wave of disbelief from the onlookers followed after the gift box was opened.

"The great Mrs. Norton of the Finner Group is offering such a pathetic gift?" Such was the general sentiment amongst the crowd.

"Oh? A massager?" The elder Mr. Norton took the gift from her.

"Y-Yes, Grandpa. I know that your body aches sometimes, so I hope this will alleviate some of your pain," Vivian explained hesitantly.

Her voice was soft and lacked confidence.

After all, she genuinely admitted that her gift was far too inferior as compared to the others.

A wave of laughter echoed about the room upon her explanation. The crowd evidently concurred with her sentiments.

Comments began to emerge. "Don't mind me saying this, Mrs. Norton, but... A massager? Don't you think that's way too lowly for such a grand occasion?"

"I mean... Considering her social standing, this sort of gift isn't that surprising," came another remark.

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"Remember those photos from the party last time? It seems like not only is she indecent, but she also can't act the part of Mrs. Norton properly either. What a disgrace to the family."

"What on earth is Mr. Norton thinking? What exactly did he see in her? And all that talk about the V.M Fund... Unbelievable."

The ruthless comments flooded Vivian's ears, leaving her hot with shame.

Never had Vivian felt so out of place until this moment. Indeed, the upper-class social circle never had a place for her. She did not even know what gift would have been appropriate for such an occasion. Vivian rationalized that she deserved to be shamed.

Finnick, enraged by the remarks, was all ready to defend Vivian. However, the elder Mr. Norton beat him to it.

Evidently pleased with the gift in hand, he beamed at Vivian and said, "This is the best present I've received thus far. In fact, it's very much my favorite. You're too lovely, Vivian. Please accept my sincerest gratitude."

The room instantly fell silent. Everyone was dumbfounded at the elder Mr. Norton's high praise.

Exchanging incredulous looks, the indignant crowd sneered at the elder Mr. Norton's explicit bias toward Vivian.

Did the old man seriously praise the gift like it's some priceless artifact?

Mark could not help but throw in a jibe. “Finnick, why don’t you consider sponsoring your wife a little? Look at this sad massager that probably costs just a few thousand dollars – it’s rather unbecoming for a company president’s wife, don’t you think?”

Finnick coolly replied, “Well, I prepared this gift with my wife. I’ve always trusted her judgement, and it has evidently been the right choice – look at how happy Grandpa is. And also, a good gift isn’t just about the value – the sincerity behind it matters too. Not sure if you can understand that though.”

“Oh, shut up!” Mark was ready to throw hands.

The elder Mr. Norton was not ready to deal with a fight today. “Oh come on, this reunion is so hard to come by – don’t be at each other’s throats all the time, alright? You two are already grown-ups, so don’t act the same way as you did when you were still kids. It’s embarrassing.”

The mention of the old days hushed the brothers up immediately.

The old man was right – the brothers were indeed at odds with each other ever since they were young. When one became ranked first in school academically, the other wanted to dethrone him. When one got into car racing, the other followed suit.

Amidst the commotion, Ashley fumed silently to the side. The elder Mr. Norton’s liking toward Vivian was much to her chagrin. But since she was under the scrutiny of others, she kept her composure.

Meanwhile, she relished the joy of knowing that the old man really believed that her pregnancy was real. Becoming a soon-to-be mother really granted her more tender loving care from the elder Mr. Norton.

Amongst artful laughter and chatting, the seconds ticked away swiftly. In a blink of an eye, it was already past eight.

The elder Mr. Norton addressed the crowd. “It’s getting late, so I suppose it’s time for everyone to return to your own rooms. It was nice seeing all of you today. I’m getting old and tend to feel lonely occasionally, so I do love to have company around at times. Thank you for being here today.”

With that, everyone bade farewell and returned to their individual rooms.

Vivian was about to slip away when the old man called her back.

“Vivian, stay and talk to me,” he said.

Hearing the exchange, Finnick wanted to stay behind too. But his request was turned down by the elder Mr. Norton with a tease. “Tsk... You don’t feel safe leaving your wife with me?”

“Grandpa, that’s not what I mean,” Finnick replied.

“Ah, then perhaps I am obstructing you two from spending some alone time tonight?”

Vivian flushed at the innuendo. “Grandpa!”

“Vivian, let’s go to my study and ignore him.” The elder Mr. Norton then strode ahead and disappeared into the room.

Vivian gave a reassuring look to Finnick and followed the old man.

Finnick knew that Mr. Norton would not do anything to Vivian, but his unease could not be quelled. Not knowing what the conversation would be about unsettled him.

Mark observed the scene at the side and smirked.

He could sense that something was off between the two. There seemed to be a lack of affection in the way they looked at each other. Looks like a talk with Vivian tonight would be good.

In the study, the elder Mr. Norton increased the temperature of the heater.

He then gestured for Vivian to come closer so that they could have a proper conversation.

As the air around them warmed, the old man began the conversation. “Having your past dug out against your will, then getting framed by your sister... The past few days have truly been rough for you and Finnick.”

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"I'm sorry for making you worry about me Grandpa," muttered Vivian.

Although the elder Mr. Norton spent most of his time at home, he still paid close attention to Mark and Finnick's movements. Vivian felt like she had embarrassed the entire Norton family. Although it was all a misunderstanding, it had caused Mr. Norton great distress.

Indeed, he was rather anxious about this matter.

He said, "The fact that Finnick undertook such a high-profile exposé to expose both of your identities shows that he still loves you. However, it also caused great commotion and bad publicity for the Norton family."

Vivian felt extremely guilt-ridden after hearing what he said.

Mr. Norton had no intention of blaming her but wanted to remind both her and Finnick to act appropriately in order to secure their jobs and prevent others from exploiting them.

Then, he suddenly remembered something and exclaimed, "Why isn't there any news from your side yet given the fact that Ashley is pregnant?"

"I'm... Not sure," stammered Vivian in embarrassment.

Although they had been married for quite some time, still, Vivian had yet to conceive.

"Sigh. If the both of you don't put in more effort, I will have to keep waiting," whined the elder Mr. Norton.

He is rather endearing sometimes.

The elder Mr. Norton thought of something again and enquired secretly, "Is it because... Finnick isn't good in bed?"

"What?" Vivian asked in shock.

"Well... I..." Vivian was deeply perturbed by what he said. "How can you be so foolish!" He exclaimed.

Vivian suddenly understood what he was trying to say. She felt extremely awkward that her whole face turned bright red.

Finnick is more than capable. She woke up with an aching back every single day from making love with Finnick. He is more than capable.

Grandpa is too obsessed with having a grandkid. How can he ask me such a question?

The elder Mr. Norton noticed her blushing face and gathered that she had finally understood what he meant. She is such an introvert. I shouldn't ask so many questions.

"Anyway, you should put in more effort. You can't let Mark and his son get all the attention," he stated.

"I will work hard Grandpa," she replied. I just have to agree with him for the time being. However, she felt like she should have been more reserved and not make such a remark.

Mr. Norton did not think too much of it as Vivian was a polite, caring and dutiful granddaughter-in-law.

Mr. Norton had instructed his servants to prepare many tonics for Vivian.

"Grandpa, I don't think I can finish all these," she exclaimed as she looked at the huge bag of tonics. If I finished all these tonics, I think I will not survive when making love to Finnick!

Mr. Norton replied, "Bring of all this home and remember to consume them everyday!" He then instructed his servants, "Bring all of this to her room and to the car when they leave."

Vivian wanted to wail out loud. I can't believe how traditional and conservative wealthy families are in terms of carrying on the family line.

Vivian walked out of his study room and wanted to head to her room upstairs. At that moment, Mark suddenly appeared.

"What a coincidence, Mark," she said cautiously.

Mark inched closer to her and whispered, "I was waiting for you."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"You heard it right. I'm here to see you." He grinned. "Come to my study. I want to have a chat with you."

Vivian furrowed her brows. She was unwilling to follow him. However, Mark was her elder brother and she could not turn him down. As a result, she had no choice but to follow him into his study room.

His study room was well-designed and was filled with books regarding the commercial world. His study table was well-organized and neat—not a speck of dust could be seen. Two large desktops were placed on the table. He likes surfing the Internet.