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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1696 - 1700

Finally, Nancy opened the car door and let Jory take a look at her car. He was so capable that he found the cause of the breakdown after a while.

Jory got up and dusted the dirt off his hands. "The valve spring is broken. Didn't you notice the symptoms when you drove it earlier? You're really impressive!"

"Alright, stop making sarcastic remarks! Is there any way to fix it?" Nancy shook him by the shoulder.

"Yes!" Jory nodded.

"How?" Nancy's eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"Well, the easiest way is to change a car!" He burst out laughing.

Nancy rebuked, "Are you buying a car for me? Stop talking nonsense! Can't you think seriously?"

Jory rolled up his sleeves. "Since you joked with me, why can't I tease you?" Despite being mischievous, he still stepped forward and helped her to reinstall the broken valve spring in reverse. He used his fair fingers to install the small valve spring carefully and perfectly.

The ray of sunlight shone on his handsome face, making him look like a charming prince who came to her rescue.

Nancy subconsciously shifted her gaze from his hand to his face. Actually, he is not that annoying. Though he keeps making sarcastic remarks and trying to irritate me purposely, he still lends a hand to me in the end.

Indeed, Nancy was staring at Jory in amazement. It was until he waved his hand before her eyes that she came to her senses. In the blink of an eye, the serious and mature appearance a moment ago seemed to be her illusion when the man before her reverted to his mischievous and playful personality.

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"Are you looking at me?"

Nancy immediately denied, "Nope! Don't talk nonsense. I'm just looking at the valve spring!"

Jory said with a playful smile, "What a lame excuse! I've already installed the valve spring."

"Really? When? Why didn't I see it?" Nancy suddenly behaved like a little foolish girl.

While pointing at himself, a sly glint came to his eye then, as if he was about to say something mischievous. "I've installed it long ago! You didn't see it because... you were staring at me!"

What Jory said hit the nail on the head, so Nancy immediately pushed him away. "No! Don't overthink. You are so full of yourself!" She then turned the car key and started the car engine.

He leaned forward and put his hand on the car window. "Hey! I've helped you. Are you going to leave without saying a word of appreciation?"

Nancy's car started to move forward. Instead of looking at Jory, she looked straight ahead. With a smile on her face, she said stubbornly, "You're helping yourself instead! You can pass through after I drive off!"

"But..." Jory watched her car moving forward slowly and shook his head helplessly.

"Thank you!" Her sweet and energetic voice was transmitted to his ears.

Well, she isn't that arrogant and unreasonable!

Meanwhile, Caspian was studying the information of the four branches acquired by Alpire Group. He had been staying late at the office for the past few days. Still, he could not find any clues from the piles of papers on his desk. In the end, Larry called and informed him that the leakage of internal information had resulted in the disclosure of their company's confidential document.

"I suspect the employee who is leaving for our competitor did this!" Caspian rubbed his chin, pondering over it.

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Larry took a sip of water and replied calmly, "This is impossible. In terms of salary, our company offers the highest pay among other competitors."

"Then, our competitor must have sent over a spy!" Caspian said confidently.

"But... we don't have any evidence and can't identify any suspect!" Larry responded.

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Feeling frustrated, Caspian covered his face with those papers. "Argh! What's going on? Why did the internal information leak out?"

"Let's think of a way to meet the directors of Alpire Group!" Immediately, anticipation gleamed in Larry's eyes as he came up with a firm and decisive plan. "I want to question them why do they keep acquiring our companies!"

Caspian continued, "I'm wondering too. There are many ways to make a fortune, but why do they choose this way? Aren't they afraid that they will offend Norton Corporation if the acquisition is unsuccessful? Though we have similar standing, it will jeopardize their future development if they offend us."

"So... their target is personal instead of business!" As soon as Larry made such a remark, both of them were shocked.

After he hung up, he sunk in thought. This assumption is way too terrifying, but the probability of it being the case is very high!

If Alpire Group really targets one of us, who will that be?

Meanwhile, Joan had just returned to Nirhaven College. She had never expected the Norton Corporation to encounter such a problem. Luckily, it was summer break, so she could allocate time for herself while having sufficient time to deal with the upcoming problems.

"Are you going to invite the directors of Alpire Group for dinner tomorrow?" Joan was holding a fork and looking at Larry with her eyes widened.

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He put some greens on her plate. While staring at those greens, his heart was filled with hope. "Yeah! They have acquired our branches, and we need to transfer those shares to them, so I think it is necessary for both parties to meet."

Larry then dipped the ladle into the casserole and continued, "So far, we've only received the acquisition contract, but they haven't taken the companies' properties and liquid assets away."

"That means they don't need the money urgently. If I were them, I would have withdrawn the funds and stocks after I acquired the company. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to cover the cost of acquisition!" Joan was trying to analyze the situation.

Upon hearing that, Larry frowned. "Darling, I feel uneasy. I don't think they are after our money. Do you think they are targeting someone in our company?"

Joan forced a smile. "Who would dare to offend such a large company knowing that he would end up in deep trouble..." She swallowed a mouthful. Suddenly, something came into her mind, and she looked at Larry with her glazed eyes. "Could you be the target?"

The next morning, the mellow sunlight passed through the transparent windows and filled the entire room with warmth. Everything was in honeyed tones, beautiful and soothing. The heat of the sun gave the room a cozy lived-in air. There was a large bed occupying almost half of the room. A handsome man was lying on his side with a beautiful woman resting on his left arm, while his right arm was embracing the woman's slender waist.

They were partially covered by a soft and fluffy quilt. There was a small figure squeezed between them, exposing half of his head. That was a cute little boy, with curly hair and ruddy lips. He was batting his long and delicate eyelashes, which looked like a butterfly fluttering its wings and shattering the rays of sunlight.

He pouted his lips, snuggling into the woman's arms. She was half asleep and could feel the touch. Then, her hand habitually pulled the quilt up, and she fell asleep again. The sun shone on the velvet curtain, and the warm light swayed gently, scattering the mottled colors all over the room.

Larry opened his eyes and saw such a beautiful scene. For a while, everything seemed to freeze. Waking up on a sunny morning with you by my side is the best moment in my life.

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Thinking about that, he could not help but chuckle. A beautiful family was indeed a diluent for all troubles. Even though Norton Corporation was in deep trouble, he still felt he was the happiest man in the world every morning.

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Perhaps the gods were jealous of his good life too, so they had to make certain arrangements to disrupt his hard-earned peace. The phone vibrated nonstop on his bedside table. Larry reached for it and peeked at the caller ID. Next thing he knew, his weariness disappeared without a trace. He sat up abruptly, removed the covers, and rushed out of the room.

What's wrong? Larry's sudden rise from the bed woke Joan up. She rubbed her eyes, still drowsy. Did Leslie wet the bed again? When Larry re-entered the room, he did not look so good. His wife noticed that his face was wet. Instincts told her something was awry. Joan sat up, pulled the blanket over Leslie, and cautiously climbed out of bed.

She was getting increasingly distraught with each passing day as surprises kept popping up. The familiar and overwhelming anxiety was eating her.

A while later she heard Larry speak. He said, as calmly as he could, "Alpire Group has acquired the fifth branch."

"Alpire Group", "acquisition", "branch"... These terms got thrown about frequently these days. She was becoming sensitive to each of those words and would feel nauseous for no reason.

The next moment, Larry put on his suit. He stood in front of the mirror fixing his tie. He only needed to get the knot right. He seemed to have lost the leisurely mood he had once upon a time, when he would eagerly make sure his attire was spick and span.

"I'll have to convene a board meeting. We have to come up with countermeasures quickly. Up till now, we've been too passive."

In the directors' conference hall, Larry sat in the main seat, dressed in formal work attire. His face appeared gloomy, as though a large raincloud was hanging over his head. On both sides of the long council table, there were ashen-faced junior executives, calculative

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shareholders with grayish beards who kept their heads low, as well as assistants who could not stop themselves from sweating profusely as they surveyed the room.

"I'm sure you all have picked up on the news lately. The ones about Alpire Group acquiring our branches. As we all know, Alpire Group is a company which has never collaborated with us before. So, for it to suddenly be capable of acquiring five of our branches in one go, I'm sure you all want to know how they did it. That is the reason why I call for this board meeting today."

"Ah, wasn't it four branches just yesterday? How did it get to five?"

The attendees began to whisper and discuss among themselves.

Larry cleared his throat and, at the same time, tapped on the bronze tabletop. Silence fell on the room once more. He always had a knack for authority and the kind of aura that demanded attention.

A potbellied senior director voiced out his disdain, "Are you doubting our loyalty, Mr. Norton?" He had been working for Norton Corporation throughout most of his life and had little respect for the young president.

"I'm not doubting anyone here. You can see for yourself the company's offer on wage offer and remuneration, how the management has been doing over the years. You can even compare them to other companies in the industry. I won't be suspicious of anyone for no reason. After all, we live in a society enforced by law. For everything we say and do, there must be evidence to match..."

Then, Larry's speech took a turn. "But each of us knows what we did, and each of us knows where we stand. The truth will speak for itself."

"Hmph," the senior director scowled. "A gigantic company like Norton Corporation should be more than capable. Even its branches should be able to stand out among the rest. Everyone in the entire corporation is a hard worker. You don't need to tell me that. Do you want to know what I think? I think Mr. Norton needs to take a closer look at himself!" He put forward a plausible defense.

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Larry snickered under his breath. "Mr. Harley, you've dedicated much of your life to the company and I respect that. However, I hope you can be mindful of one fact. Seniority and experience no longer take precedence, and age no longer translates to ability. "

Larry turned his gaze away from the older man and raised his voice, "Of course, I have absolute confidence in the financial prowess of our company, but even an ant hole could wreck a mammoth bridge. This time, five of our branches have been acquired. We have to find out which part of the company's operation is being taken advantage of!"

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"So far, after relentless investigation and tracking, we found that all five acquired branches have one thing in common. That is, information has been leaked from the inside. I hope everyone here can consider the issue from this angle. At the same time, we have to enhance the monitoring and supervision of all the information that come and go between various departments, in order to avoid any more leakage. We don't want it happening again!"

As soon as he said that, the room became abuzz with chatter again. Larry did not intend to stop them. However, the old man whom Larry referred to as "Mr. Harley" had something more to say, and he went about it loudly, "Mr. Norton, I hope you can also bear this in mind. The board of directors has the power to dismiss a president with poor performance at any time. Norton Corporation has never encountered a crisis as bad as this one since its establishment... until now. I implore Mr. Norton to reflect on his actions. Similarly, we as the directors should also be held accountable for failing to assist you..." The old man gave Larry a sidelong glance. He spoke eloquently, in a gentle tone.

Under the table, Larry clenched his fists. He would not allow Norton Corporation to fall on his watch. He swore he would not let his father's hard work go for nothing.

Additionally, he did not want to disappoint his followers and their expectations of him. He also wanted to prove his point, that age does not translate to ability.

In the evening, Larry pushed the door open and entered his home. He was knackered with his thoughts fully occupied by the tiring board meeting.

"You're finally back." Joan knew about Norton Corporation's crisis. She deliberately requested the manager to let her get off work early, so that she could get home before Larry did.

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Larry buried himself in the sofa and accepted Joan's glass of lemonade.

"You should stop taking coffee, dear. It doesn't go well with the stress." Joan sat down beside him and dutifully massaged his shoulders.

Within a few days, Alpire Group had managed to acquire five of Norton Corporation's branch companies. She was of the opinion that a huge acquisition project such as this would have required long-term preparation. She had no intention of putting the blame on the company employees, but the information leak did not hinder one from wondering whether there were spies in their midst.

"Do you have any ideas who's behind this?" Joan inquired softly. "Now that you're home, let's put the problem aside. You have to take care of your health. That's the capital to move forward. Only then can you build the strength to come up with solutions."

"Joan, at the directors' meeting today, they questioned me. They questioned my abilities, my business methods. They still think that experience is everything..." Larry's voice was deeper than usual as he complained to his wife.

Joan gave his hand a tight squeeze. "Don't take what they say to heart, dear. I believe in you!"

Larry drank the lemonade in one go. His mouth and teeth were instantly filled with bitterness, just like his mood. But Joan held his hand firmly as she continued to give him the strength he did not know he needed. Her hand always seemed to be able to give him the power to march forward.

Joan chuckled softly. She leaned over to give Larry a hug and whispered in his ear, "Larry, I've told you before. No matter what kind of difficulties we face, I'll go through them with you, hand in hand. Even if no one else believes you, please know that you have me. I'll stand by you, forever and always."

Forever and always..." Larry slowly held onto her fingers, feeling her cool temperament and sweet sensitivity. Her presence was like peach blossoms in April. Fair, light, and swaying in the wind. Then, her fragrance overwhelmed him and eventually got under his skin.

This woman had always been standing by his side.

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To be able to spend the rest of his life with her, what more could he ask for?

Jory's journey to Barrymore Group this time had been smooth-sailing. Unwittingly, he chose the same road he had taken last time, where he had been stopped by a daft, boisterous, egoistic woman and her red Bentley.

He had his hands on the steering wheel, his fingers tapping on the surface every once in a while. As he came to a red light, he joined the row of cars in forming a neat and orderly line. As he thought about what happened the other day, he actually felt a tinge of indescribable disappointment. Once it popped into his mind, he laughed at himself for quite some time.

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Why are you disappointed, Jory? You're not a masochist, are you? Geez, that's right. Why am I thinking of that woman? Though, if someone offers me the chance to see her again, I probably won't say no.

The letters symbolizing Barrymore Group glared fiercely under the sunlight. Jory locked his car and, with his hand, shielded his eyes from the sun hanging above his head. It was awfully hot that day. Jory entered the building and was greeted by the security guard on duty. The guard respectfully bowed at the man dressed in formal wear despite not knowing who Jory was.

He found himself in the reception hall of Barrymore Group. The first thing he saw was the large, golden front desk. The sight of it dazzled him only because he had just escaped the sun's brightness. His eyes had not fully adjusted to the glare. This place made him feel like he had just entered the evil landlord's lair.

There were many green potted plants in the area. Most of the staff in the company tended to work their eyes intensively, so green plants could help keep their vision in check. On the leather sofa by the side sat a few important-looking people scrolling on their phones and sipping tea.

"May I help you, sir?" The receptionist gave him a welcoming smile.

Jory put up an even more pleasant one. "I'd like to meet the chairman."

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"I'm afraid an appointment is required in order to meet the chairman, sir. Do you have an appointment?" The receptionist replied politely.

Jory shook his head, and fished out a name card from his suit pocket. The receptionist turned it over, and then kindly gave him the directions he would need, "The chairman's office is on the twenty-sixth floor."

Jory entered the elevator and found the button which would take him to the twenty-sixth floor. He pressed it. The doors of the elevator slowly closed, but then a palm-wide gap stopped it from going all the way. Jory thought that there was a malfunction, so he pressed the "close" button again. As he did so, a piercing scream almost penetrated his eardrums.

It was a little bit too late when he discovered a slender, fair hand had been crushed between the closing doors. He quickly pressed the other button, prompting the doors to slide open, and the woman outside rushed into the elevator, understandably fuming.

"I apologize," he said.

"Didn't you see me block the door? Why did you close it anyway?"

Jory's heart skipped a beat when he recognized the voice. He turned to face the other occupant in the elevator. She was still rubbing her injured hand.

"I said, why..." As she shouted, she lifted her head to confront the tall figure next to her, only to find herself looking into Jory's deep-set eyes.

"It's you!" the two of them blurted simultaneously.

Nancy quickly turned her face away. She chuckled softly. "Well, what do you know? It's a small world after all."

"Sounds more like you owe me one. I helped fix your car, remember?" Jory quipped.

Before he could finish, Nancy held up her injured hand and waved in front of Jory. It had become visibly red and swollen. "Well, look at what you have done. Does this make us even?"

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The conversation hung in the air as silence loomed over them, while the elevator slowly made its way up the building. Jory felt like he would suffocate if he did not say anything. He might not get another chance like this. The woman was heading to the twentieth floor, and they were arriving soon. Just then. Jory did the unthinkable.

He broke the awkward silence between them. He was not very loud, but the tiny space in the elevator somehow amplified the volume. "Your hand... is it okay?"

Nancy was obviously taken aback by his sudden question. They had only met each other twice. Unfortunately, he had left her with a bad impression. She thought of him as a generally salty person with a sharp tongue, and yet here he was, "kindly" asking about her injury. For a moment, her hand was the least of her worries. She felt mortified all over. Something was definitely off.

That was when the elevator decided to stop, for they had reached the twentieth floor. The door opened slowly. Nancy simply straightened her hair and casually snorted at the man, "It's fine. I'm leaving."

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