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Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1701 - 1705

Jory watched her disappear behind the closing doors. He got even more crestfallen.

He rubbed his forehead and rearranged his thoughts. I'm meeting a VIP next. C'mon, get your act together! Soon, the doors open again with a ding, and he exited the elevator with steady steps.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Come in."

Simon Barrymore's voice, along with its hoarseness and vicissitudes that came with his age, rang from inside. One could actually feel what the old man had been through, even experience a little part of their life, just by listening to the sound of his voice.

"Mr. Barrymore," Jory greeted him loudly.

Simon looked up from his work to acknowledge his guest's presence. Yet, he was unable to recognize Jory. No one in the Barrymore Group would call him by his last name. Calling him by his title would have sufficed. So who was this strange, young man standing in his office?

"And you are..."

Jory tilted his head. "Don't you remember me?" Simon only looked more confused, so the young man added, "I'm from Alpire Group."

It took a while, but eventually Simon managed to pick up the man's name from the depths of his memory. He stretched out a hand and rose from his seat. "Jory? When have you arrived at Marsingfill?"

"Not long ago," Jory responded with a grin.

Simon poured his guest a cup of tea and then, when he saw that Jory was still standing in his office, offered him a seat on the sofa. "Why are you still standing there? Come, come. Have a seat. How's your father been all these years?"

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A green leaf could be seen floating on the steaming tea. Simon used a tea tray with designs depicting ancient Chanaean culture. Its grid-like weaving method made the simple art of tea sampling much more fulfilling.

One of Raphael's paintings, "The School of Athens", hung on Simon's wall. It was apparent that the chairman was a great fan of Chanaean culture.

Jory was so deeply amazed by the ancient Chanaean relics surrounding him that it took him a while to respond to the chairman's question. "He's doing fine. I believe business is thriving at Barrymore Group as well?"

Simon waved his hand. "'No, no. We are no match for Alpire Group's rapid growth after all. That's a given."

"Mr. Barrymore, I suppose I won't dally any longer. I come here today with a business proposal," Jory said, driving his point home. "As you can see, Alpire Group's development is gradually stabilizing. But, in the process of it all, what we lack is collaboration. And as you know, collaboration between two strong companies is the unchanging rule for survival in this industry. So..."

Simon interrupted the young man before he could finish. "Jory, listen. As the chairman of Barrymore Group, I am more than happy to know that Alpire Group has chosen us to establish a partnership. But, Jory, since you've come to us seeking one, I'm sure you're also aware of our company's development so far. Our partners have always been local companies. Barrymore Group has never cooperated with multinational companies. And we don't plan to start now."

The corners of Jory's lips drooped briefly and, when he smiled, he looked defeated. "Mr. Barrymore, that incident happened so long ago. You shouldn't take it to heart. I have learned to move on, and you ought to let it go too. I'm the only victim after all."

Simon looked apologetic. "But, Jory, you have to know, the Barrymores are in your debt because of what happened. While I'm pleased to know that you've moved on, that can't be used as a reason for Barrymore Group to work with a multinational company such as yours. Look, Jory. If you insist on bringing it up, then I'm afraid you're just wasting your time."

The old man was clearly still brooding over the incident many years ago. He claimed that Barrymore Group had never worked with multinational companies. That was obviously an

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excuse to brush him off. The old man just did not want to get involved with him. He had so many years under his belt, and yet he still bore an immense fear of gossip.

Since Simon was so frank about it—that collaboration was a no-go—then Jory would not force him, nor would he keep pestering the old man until he changed his mind. After all, Jory knew very well that Alpire Group was currently a lot stronger than before. Besides, he still had a trump card up his sleeves—the bug which Gabriella had installed in Joan’s phone.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1702

One of the reasons for Jory’s visit to Barrymore Group was to discuss collaboration with Simon. Being able to work together with a company of the same class would only reap benefits for Alpire Group. There was no reason for Jory not to give it a go.

Secondly, Jory came here to try his luck. He wanted to see if he could meet the woman who had rejected him back then. He also wanted to prove to her that he was not the worthless man she thought he was. In fact, he was a capable man of excellence, one who would make her regret her decision!

Between the two reasons, the second preceded the first. To him, it did not matter whether the business proposal fell through or not. If it did, then it meant good news for Alpire Group and its development; if it did not, it would not incur substantial damage to Alpire Group anyway.

Since it had come to this, Jory believed he had no more reason to stay. It was a shame, because Simon had made him a good cup of tea, and he had only taken a sip. He would not have the chance to drink again.

Simon’s mood obviously took a turn for the better now that Jory stopped bothering him about work. He even encouraged Jory to come visit him more often when the young man made to take his leave.

Of course, Jory was only being polite. After bidding farewell to Simon, accompanied by a smile, Jory placed his hand on the doorknob. He found it strange when he felt the knob shaking when he had barely made a move to turn it. Within half a second, the door of the chairman’s office flung open from the outside. The doorknob which Jory had been holding also sprung out of his hand.

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The person who entered the room had on the professional white-collar outfit of a businesswoman, but it was her face which Jory had a hard time taking his eyes off. They had met before, first on the road a few days prior, and the second time in the elevator, just over half an hour ago.

Difference being, this time she had a document in hand. Earlier, she had been empty-handed. The woman also recognized the guest in the chairman's office. Both of them bore the same frozen expression as they exchanged looks and locked eyes. Both were equally alarmed by the circumstances that brought them together. You again!

Simon assumed this was the first time they met. Ever since the engagement was called off, he thought the two would never have the chance to meet. Obviously, fate had other plans.

Although Simon would rather they remain strangers, it could not be helped that they were currently facing each other. So, Simon bit the bullet and proceeded to make introductions. "Jory, meet my daughter, Nancy."

"Nancy, this is Jory, heir to Alpire Group."

While Simon was doing that, the other two interpreted it differently. "There you have it. She's your ex-fiancée, and he's your ex-fiancé," was what they heard.

Although they had met more than once... they had not exactly asked for the other person's name. As a result, this official introduction turned out to be much more embarrassing than their previous chance encounters.

Jory was first to extend his hand. After all, he ought to be the gentleman in this situation, especially in front of a lady. Exercising basic courtesy, he said, "Nice to meet you. I'm Jory."

Nancy was dumbfounded from the minute she opened the door and found him in her father's office. Back at the elevator, she had been wondering who he was and what he was doing here. Is he the manager of some other company? Or perhaps one of our major shareholders! He did press the button for the twenty-sixth floor, so he must be here to meet Dad! What a surprise! This man whom I keep walking into happens to be that unlucky playboy I rejected years ago!

Nancy totally loathed the idea of him. She had always hated the kind of underachiever who somehow managed to live vicariously through the hard work of others.

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And, well, he seemed to fit the bill of one of those young, rich heirs who would rather be chasing skirts all day.

So when she found out that he was her marriage partner, she wanted so badly to call it off. Even if she had not met Caspian then, she would have outright rejected Jory even if she had her head strapped on the guillotine!

But after the last two encounters, Jory did not seem to the terrible man she had pictured him to be. The man was tough on the outside, soft on the inside, genuinely cared about others, and would actively admit his mistakes. In contrast, it would take a miracle for Nancy to utter an apology.

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1703

So you're Nancy Barrymore! My so-called fiancée who dumped me for no reason!

That was the only thought that popped into Jory's head when her name was revealed. However, he did not feel the slightest hint of hatred, which he had originally expected to have when they finally met. In fact, he realized he did not hate her at all. On the contrary, he seemed to have developed an interest in her.

"What a coincidence! This is the third time we meet, and I finally get to know your name. I'm really sorry for what happened just now. Why don't I buy you a drink?" Jory took note of her crushed hand from earlier and decided to right his wrong.

Nancy was thinking along the same lines. "That's what I was thinking! I'm really sorry for my rude behavior the other day. I haven't thanked you enough for fixing my car."

Simon was startled by their instant friendliness and willingness to buy each other a drink. Do they know each other already? Who has introduced them, and when did it all happen? There was no room for him to think, for the two young people had cheerfully left his office to get some drinks.

Jory and Nancy had gone to a bar with a rather unique ambience. It was unlike other bars she had seen before, which were mostly smoky, reeked of cigarettes, frequented by men looking for pleasure and women with obscure faces.

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Jory simply ordered two glasses of wine with relatively low alcohol content, and was first to break the stalemate. "I didn't expect our third meeting to turn out like this. To be honest, you're quite different from what I imagined."

Nancy grinned. "Oh, do tell me. What kind of image did you have of me? And how has that perception changed now that we're formally introduced?"

Jory looked up at the crystal chandelier, with its sparkling glass crystals, hanging above him. After putting in some thought, he said, "Well, for starters, before I met you, you sounded like the kind of woman who would jump to conclusions about other people despite not knowing them well. When I met you, I thought of you as arrogant and capricious. Now, after meeting you for the third time, you're actually quite alright."

"As for why it came to that, I can't really tell. I guess it's just a feeling people get after they realize they get to know each other!" Jory added.

Nancy toyed with the napkin on the table. "Don't you want to know what I think of you?"

To her surprise, Jory shook his head. His mouth twitched as he spoke, "I don't want to know, and I don't think it's worth finding out. If I remember correctly, you got married a few years ago, didn't you?"

Nancy argued, "So what if I'm married? There's no law that says a married woman cannot be friends with an unmarried man, is there?"

"If you ask me, pure friendships do not exist between men and women. In fact, it goes beyond that," Jory gave a mysterious answer. He just wanted to let her know that he was not promiscuous at all, so that she would doubt her own judgments, especially the ones she had about him back then, all of which turned out to be false.

Nancy only got more confused, but she had always been straightforward, and that was how she responded. "I used to hear that you're a run-of-the-mill playboy."

"And? Has our meeting today changed your opinion of me? As the saying goes, seeing is believing. You should only believe what you see with your own eyes. So, now that you've met me, do you think I'm what the rumors say I am?" Jory asked jokingly, but his smile at that time was a bit more restrained than the ones he had on during their previous chance encounters.

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“We’ve only just met for the third time. How should I know what kind of person you really are?” Nancy teased. “Who knows, maybe you’re deliberately putting up an act in order to hide your true nature.”

When Jory heard that, an odd feeling rose within him. His next comment was dripping with sarcasm. “Then, it seems my performance today wasn’t good enough, for you to think of me that way.”

Right then, the server brought them the wine they had ordered. Jory held the wine bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. He poured one for himself first, then another for Nancy. Gripping the bottom of the wine glass between his middle and index finger, he proposed a toast, “I’m sorry I rubbed you the wrong way. Allow me to drain my glass first.”

Never Late, Never Away Chapter 1704

Nancy hesitated. She seldom consumed alcohol, and she had no idea what sort of drunk personality she would exhibit later. She examined the red liquid in the wine glass in front of her, her mind a tangled mess.

Jory could easily see through her thoughts. He arched his eyebrows at her as he spoke, “Don’t worry, I ordered wine with low alcohol content. Just go ahead and drink.”

Since he said that, she could not possibly refuse. She proceeded to take a sip of the wine. A spicy and bitter taste instantly exploded in her mouth. Ew, how can anyone drink this stuff? And even be addicted to it!

“You don’t really drink, do you? Then, we shouldn’t come here next time.” Jory observed the indescribable expression on her face. Her cheekiness had left the building. In its place was dismay.

Nancy coughed a few times. “Don’t mind me. I’ve always imagined that the next time we meet, we’ll either start a fight or verbal warfare. It’s never crossed my mind that we’ll be here, sitting at a table in a bar, having drinks and a lovely chat.”

Jory continued to sip on his wine while maintaining a rather elegant posture, like one of those members of nobility in one of those eighteenth-century oil paintings.

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Nancy was not a seasoned drinker, and she had no plans to force herself. Sitting opposite Jory, she simply put down her glass and, resting her chin on her hands, watched him as he drank.

“By the way, what business do you have with my father? I saw you in the elevator this morning and there’s something I’ve been wanting to ask you...” Nancy began. After careful consideration, she supposed she should not pass up such a good opportunity to dig up some answers. She might possibly be able to help Joan find out the truth behind the acquisition of Norton Corporation’s branches.

Jory had his eyes closed as he savored the sensation of alcohol exciting his taste buds. “Ask away.”

“Why does Alpire Group want to acquire the five branches of Norton Corporation?” Nancy asked as she blinked quizzically at him, keenly anticipating his response.

“For the money.” Jory had always answered questions in a simple and concise manner. His three-word reply was clear-cut and irrefutable because he had just laid out a bare fact. The fundamental purpose of mergers and acquisitions between companies was, ultimately, money-motivated!

Those three words completely stumped Nancy. She feigned calmness and took another sip of her drink, only to cover her mouth again as more coughing ensued.

Jory poured her a glass of plain water from the jug next to him. Between her coughs, it was strenuous for Nancy to express her gratitude. It took some time for her to recover and utter her thanks, however faintly it turned out.

“Of course, it’s for the money. I didn’t think it was a secret. As I said, a large part of a company’s growth has always been done through the acquisition of other companies and reaping the gains from their stocks in order to keep growing. You should know that, don’t you?”

Nancy nodded. She understood that acquisitions were performed with a financial motive, but that was not what she was asking at all. In her subconscious mind, she believed that Alpire Group’s repetitive moves to acquire Norton Corporation’s branches were essentially an attempt to gradually destroy the said company. Furthermore, Alpire Group’s greed did not come to an end when profits had been made. Instead, it intensified. Their plans were still

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being carried out progressively, while Norton Corporation was slowly being devoured by the giant.

Nancy knew the reason for the whole venture had to be beyond monetary gains, but she had no clue how to go about questioning Jory. To him, she was the woman who turned down the engagement and brought him much humiliation.

If she had been the one who had been divorced, she would probably remember it for the rest of her life and might not forgive the other person. Therefore, she could totally empathize with Jory's current mood. She could not imagine how much it must have taken for the man to confront her, to let go of the past completely, and to let his guard down around her.

She held the glass of plain water that Jory had poured for her. The lukewarm temperature was similar to general feeling Jory rubbed off on her—gentle and approachable. But she refused to trust him so easily. She could not be sure if his gentlemanly appearance was a farce he put up just to confuse her. She could not be sure if the person before her was as gentle and elegant as the plain water in the glass, without a trace of danger.

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Hurriedly, she made up an excuse and left the bar, leaving Jory there all by himself. He did a lot of thinking. He thought about the past, the present, and the future. He let his imagination roam and his fantasies fly, and somehow he seemed to understand a little bit more why Dustin had been so desperately searching for that person...

He used to tease Dustin that he got hung up over a woman too easily, that he could never seem to let go of Joan. He often failed to understand why the man would rather reject the many wonderful women around him and continue to waste his efforts on a married woman.

Love does not discriminate when it comes to time or targets, and it makes matches in no particular order. How can you be sure who you'll fall in love with in the next second? One could not predict when or how it would happen, just like Jory at the moment. He had no idea that he was starting to develop a different kind of feelings for Nancy. He supposed he might have fallen in love with her, but if someone asked him what love was, he could not come up with a clear answer.

"What's up, Caspian? Are you still unable to contact the director of Alpire Group?"

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"I'm afraid not, Boss. I don't know what's going on. I've searched for all the contact information of almost all the existing corporations, but I can't find anything on Alpire Group!" Caspian reported. He was extremely anxious, for this was the first time he had ever felt so powerless. His efforts had been in vain.

On the other side, Larry was getting increasingly worried. "What can we do now? We want to meet them, but we can't even find their contact number. The branches are being acquired one after another. If this goes on, we'll eventually go out of business!"

Caspian did not respond. The noise on his side was getting louder and louder, so much so that Larry could barely make out his voice. Larry placed his ears closer to the receiver in desperate need to hear Caspian amid the noise, when the latter suddenly yelled, "Get them out of here!"

Before Larry could even ask the man whatever was going on, Caspian beat him to it. "Boss, whatever you do, don't come to the company. I don't know how the hell they did it but this place has been swarming with journalists for the past few days, especially today. They all want to come into the building to interview you. Boss, you cannot come here! They'll have you cornered!"

"Caspian, what's going on? Why are there suddenly so many journalists?" Larry asked uneasily.

"I don't know, boss! There's a lot more of them today! It's like they have made a pact to swarm in here! I heavily suspect that they're acting under someone else's orders. Whatever you do, do not come here!"

Despite Caspian's repeated warnings, Larry believed he had to go see for himself. He was the president of Norton Corporation. He should be shouldering all responsibility, and not be shielded by his staff. He was not a coward. Hence, he must step forward to bear the burden. As the saying goes, with great power comes great responsibility. He understood that much since he took over his father's company. He thanked Caspian hurriedly over the phone and swiftly made his way to the company.

Before Larry's black car could even come to a stop in front of the company's entrance, the journalists, all of whom had been pestering the front desk manager despite being blocked by the security guard, immediately swarmed towards the president. One by one, they pressed themselves on the car windows like layers of vines.

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They held up microphones representing various TV stations and online shows. Behind them were the camera crew. They clung onto Larry, hungry and desperate for the latest scoop.

“Mr. Norton, can you tell us how your company’s doing lately?”

“Mr. Norton, can you talk about the underlying causes of the stock volatility?”

“Mr. Norton! Mr. Norton! What’s your opinion on the rumors that Norton Corporation’s about to be acquired by Alpire Group, the multinational company? “

“Mr. Norton, can you take a moment to accept our interview?”

Their many faces resembled the scary images one would often find in horror stories. They screamed, clamored, and twisted, while Larry struggled to catch his breath. He could not even make out their faces as he could only feel the opening and closing of their mouths. So much mumbling and murmuring rang about his ears, but he could hear nothing else other than the sounds of his own beating heart. Thump! Thump! Thump! It was all so deafening, as if the noise could pierce through his chest at any given moment.

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