

A photograph of two women walking away from the camera on a paved path in a park. They are holding hands. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a setting or rising sun, creating long shadows on the path. Trees and foliage are visible in the background, and the overall mood is nostalgic and serene.

Classic Collection #5

FOREVER IS OVER

NORMA JEAN LUTZ

Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection – Book #5

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All of the characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Photo Credit:

[Silhouettes of two girl friends walking holding hands in the Park](#)

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A note from the author:

I love to hear from my readers. You may contact me here:

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A Word about the *Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection*

During my writing career, I've been privileged to have over 50 titles published under my name. Due to the nature of the publishing world in days past, most of these titles were off the shelves and out of print in a short period of time. Sad but true.

Now, a new day has dawned in the word of publishing. Digital publishing has created the opportunity for my past titles to be reintroduced to a whole new generation of readers.

These stories are timeless in spite of the fact they were penned several decades ago. Hence, I have chosen to call them the *Norma Jean Lutz Classic Collection*.

Forever is Over is Book #5 in the Classic Collection series.

I'm excited to be able to bring these stories out of the files and into your hands. I hope you enjoy your read.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Norma Jean Lutz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

This book is dedicated to:

My four God-given grandchildren, whom I adore.

They bring so much joy into my life!

I can never get done thanking God for giving me these precious gifts.

Tobias Vincent Lutz

Elisabeth Nichole Huber

Matthew Alexander (Max) Huber

Ethan Zane Huber

Chapter 1

Lori Ann Layton was on her way to the newspaper room last hour when her friend, Sara, stopped her in the hall.

"Lori, I knew you'd want to be the first to know. Maritza Novales is coming back to Birchfield."

For a minute, Lori thought Sara meant for a visit—that Maritza was coming back to Birchfield to visit. She wondered why her old friend hadn't contacted her first. Lori shifted the heavy load of books in her arms and watched as Grady Pendergrass loped into the newspaper room. As usual he was whistling. He never whistled a melody, but only a tuneless sound. She wasn't planning to look his way as he passed, but she did. And when she did, he smiled and nodded at her. She looked away.

"When's she coming?" Lori asked Sara. "And for how long?" She wondered if there was any chance she and Maritza could get together.

"How long?" Sara gave a puzzled look.

"A weekend? A week? Two weeks? How long is she staying?"

"Coming back to *live*, I mean. Moving back to Birchfield."

Lori's heart hit her throat. "You're kidding. Really?"

"That's why I came to find you. I knew you'd want to know."

"How'd you find out?"

Silly question. Sara worked part-time in the school office and knew all the scuttlebutt that went on. If the principal had known how much she told, he probably would have canned her long ago.

"Her transcript arrived from a school in Cleveland. That's where she'd moved to, wasn't it? Cleveland?"

Lori nodded. When Maritza first moved away, Cleveland seemed clear across the world rather than fifty miles down the interstate.

"And besides the transcript," Sara was saying, "a phone call came in from her mother. I heard Mr. Tanner talking to her about what classes were still available."

Lori swallowed her growing excitement. Everyone who'd been with them in grade school knew how close she and Maritza had been. Not only friends but next-door neighbors, from kindergarten through sixth grade. But still Lori wondered why Maritza hadn't called to let her know. "When's her first day?"

"Next Monday."

Lori didn't want to say or do anything to hurt Sara's feelings, but she couldn't contain the mounting exhilaration she felt. Sara had been super to Lori since Maritza moved away—taking her into her circle of friends and accepting her. But nothing was ever the same for Lori after Maritza left.

"Did you happen to see the address?"

"It's over in the St. Vincent area."

"St. Vincent? But that's out of our district, isn't it?"

Sara nodded. "Special transfer request, I think."

"Can you get her phone number for me?"

"Not today. It's all filed away. Mrs. Hager watches things like a hawk in that office. You might try calling information."

Lori brightened. She could call Maritza that very night. Now maybe things would get back into order in her life. Maritza back. It was almost too good to be true. She reached out and touched Sara's arm. "Thanks so much for the info. I really appreciate it." She nodded toward the newspaper room. "I'm late. I better scoot. Talk to you after school."

Sara shook her head. "It's Wednesday. I have piano lessons, remember? We'll talk later."

"Right."

The staff was already gathered around the table when she arrived in the newspaper room. Miss Dunbar was still rummaging around her desk. Stacks of newspapers, news magazines, and books were tottering unsteadily as she rummaged. Lori marveled that the woman found anything in the mess.

On the chalkboard was printed in bold lettering: "Welcome to the 1982-83 newspaper staff!" Bulletin boards about the room were covered with fat, black headlines from national newspapers. Two computers sat at tables against the far wall. Miss Dunbar would have had the AP and UPI wire services hooked up in the room if it were possible. She constantly impressed upon them the necessity of being aware of world events. "Don't walk through life with your head in the sand," she'd say.

This was Lori's second year on staff. She never dreamed when she first started that she'd become editor. The vote came last May at the end of her seventh

grade year. Miss Dunbar had offered her opinion, but she let the staff vote. Jennifer, the outgoing editor, presented Lori with a mouse pad with her name on it. Sort of a joke gift, but Jennifer warned Lori she'd be spending endless hours at that computer hammering out stories to Miss Dunbar's perfection.

That would be nothing new. Lori had spent hours at the computer last year hammering out stories.

Miss Dunbar sent a copy of the Birchfield Star Times sailing from her desk to the table. Grady was reading a book, but he reached out one long arm and stopped the paper before it slid across and off on the floor. "That's yesterday's," she said. "Let's see what we can find of interest. We need to have something of national, state, and local interest in every issue." This explanation was for the benefit of the newer seventh graders on staff. The eighth graders had heard it all last year.

Lori stared for a moment at the date on the masthead, August 31, 1987. The first day of her last year in middle school. Pretty dramatic when she stopped to think about it.

"The local thrust of our first issue will be, of course," Miss Dunbar continued, "the school board election." She finished rummaging in her desk and came to the table with her arms full of a stack of papers and magazines. They slid onto the table just as she sat down. Miss Dunbar was long-legged and spindly—shaped like a track star. Her short, curly hair added to her athletic appearance.

"I suggest an interview of Warren Layton," she said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "Find out why he decided to run and what campaign techniques he used. What do you think?"

Lori's mind was still flooded with thoughts of Maritza and what they would do together first. Lori would want to have her come for a sleepover as soon as possible. There would be so much to catch up on.

"Lori? Miss Editor-In-Chief?" said Miss Dunbar. "Are you with us?"

"What?"

"Your dad," Grady said to her over the top of his book. "She wants to know..."

"Thank you, Grady," Miss Dunbar interrupted. "I believe I can still speak for myself."

"An interview with Dad." Lori came back to consciousness. "To find out why he ran and what campaign techniques he used. Sure. That'd be okay, I guess."

"His campaign technique was simple." This remark came from Amy who was Lori's writing buddy from last year. "Once he announced he was in favor of academic eligibility requirements, he was a shoo-in."

Lori knew Amy was close to being right. Every red-blooded parent in Birchfield was fed up with the boys being neck-deep in sports, yet flunking classes. Girls flunked too--but the boys seemed to be the worst offenders. If the new ruling took effect, students unable to maintain a certain grade level would be booted off the various teams.

The school board had long claimed they intended to take such action, but usually there was a father or two on the board who didn't have the fortitude to push the thing through. Lori had a sneaking suspicion her father was going to tip the scales.

Some of the jocks must have thought so, too. That morning when she came in the school's front door, Atch had yelled at her, "Layton, your old man's a beast!"

Atch was Charlie Atchison, captain of the wild and wooly East Birch Junior High football team. He was probably getting nervous. She made a face at him and hurried on to class. If Atch and his buddies would make one tiny little effort at hitting the books they'd have no worries.

After Atch's rude remark in the hall, she was ready to forget the election. She was proud of her dad, but she sometimes wished he weren't so *involved* in everything.

"If Lori doesn't feel comfortable interviewing her own dad," Grady said, placing a bookmark neatly in his book and closing it, "I could do it. He's my neighbor, you know." Grady's lean face and high cheekbones reminded Lori of Ichabod Crane. His dark hair, cut rather short, made his skin seem pale.

Miss Dunbar looked from Grady back to Lori and waited.

"I think I can interview my own father, thank you," Lori told him curtly.

"I just thought since you're so close to the subject it may be difficult to be objective," Grady said. He unfolded his long legs from beneath his chair and as he stretched them out, he accidentally kicked Lori's ankle. "Oops. Sorry."

She pulled her legs back as quickly as if she'd been burned. Ever since his family had moved into Maritza's house, in one way or another, Grady was always bumping into her. "Let me worry about being objective," she informed him. "You worry about your own work."

"Grady's right, Lori," Miss Dunbar said. "Objectivity may become a problem since you're so close to the subject."

Lori bristled. When Grady first arrived at East Birch last spring and found his way into the newspaper room, Miss Dunbar hadn't paid much attention to him. But in the two weeks since the new term started it seemed to Lori that she always took his side.

"I'll have Amy help me." She glanced in Amy's direction. Amy beamed back a wide smile. What Amy lacked in size she made up for in spunk and neon clothes. "We'll work on it as a duo assignment."

"Great," Amy said. "Since I'm the one being objective, will I get top billing?" Bylines were extremely important to Amy. She dreamed of being a reporter on a big city daily one day. Her dark pony tail was tightly fastened with a fluorescent yellow ribbon, which projected from her head like bright sunflower petals. Since she was shorter than most every other girl in eighth grade, she said—always with a giggle—that the colors kept her from getting lost in the halls.

"Let's worry about byline placements when we get the story written," Miss Dunbar suggested. "Now let's look at the lead stories in *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*." She handed out several magazines. "How are they alike and how are they different?"

Lori never enjoyed world news. Depressing. Scary. She glanced out the window of the newspaper room. The view took in the front lawn of the school. Summer petunias, marigolds, and delphinium were still in full bloom in the flower beds lining the front walk. The ropes on the flag pole slapped smartly in the breeze. Across the street on a board fence was one of her father's campaign posters for the school board election. She sat up straight and squinted her eyes to see it better. Sure enough. Some jerk had drawn a curled mustache and pointy little beard on the face and horns coming out of the head.

Lori leaned back and sighed. It was not a good sign.

For the rest of Lori Ann's story
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