

## Midnight 26

### Stop Lying To Me

But Dylan was neither of these. He was more like a skyscraper or a pyramid. His base was flung wide open. You could walk among the more mundane features of his life without any hindrance, but as you went up, into the more important bits, you would suddenly find closed doors and dead-ends and he wouldn't refuse to answer, he would just answer in a way that wasn't really an answer at all.

It all made him rather mysterious to her.

After he left, she decided to give Kevin a call after all because her evening had become uncanny from that one act.

He answered. No hello. "Did you return to your uncle's house?"

"Well, I mean, I went back, yeah." She said, "no big deal."

"Oh, good." He paused. They were wasting time, she knew. There was something else he wanted to ask. Something much more important than making small-talk unbearable. Finally, he said it. "Savannah, I want to see you."

"Now?" She said. She'd expected he did, but it still shocked her.

"You don't want to see me?" He asked. She could hear the hurt curling at the flecked edges of his voice.

"Of course!" Savannah blurted out, "I mean, yeah, I would love to."

They agreed to meet at a cafe downtown, where she'd never been before and hung up. Her heart was racing, and she took a moment to calm down on the bed. She fell back into the duvet and pulled a pillow over her head, breathed deep, hot breaths, and groaned.

She was more than a little conflicted. She'd wanted him to call her, so much, but now that he had, she was scared. She had -gulp- feelings. Her heart sprang when he asked, and for a moment, she was elated. Then she slammed into a brick wall. Dylan had forbidden her from meeting him. She had signed a contract for god's sake.

She lay there for what felt like a long time, her mind turning things over. Dylan was kissing her on the forehead; her feelings towards Kevin and towering over both, Dylan. A Colossus was looming over her, his large, sandalled foot threatening to squash her into the earth. What did it all mean? What the hell was going on?

Dylan wouldn't find out if she did go, she supposed, and even if he did, he would understand, she guessed. After all, she was meeting him in a public space. It wasn't as if anything would happen. But even as she told herself this, the words rang hollow.

She tossed and turned in the bed, finally deciding that it was okay. She went downstairs to the kitchen. "Judy, I've thought about it, and I want to go shopping now."

Judy smiled kindly at her, "Okay, come back early."

She nodded and went upstairs to gather her things. It was better to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission, she told herself. But when she thought about Dylan, she wasn't so sure.

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It took her an hour by bus. She alighted alone at a shaded bus-stop, handbag wedged under her arm and blue dress swinging about her knees. It was baking hot out. She pulled down her shades and stuck out down the road towards the cafe.

The street was an eclectic mix of independent music, art, florist, barber, and pet shops, and a crowd of sun-kissed Californians crowded the sidewalk. She weaved past them, wishing she'd worn a hat the sun beat down on the back of her neck, glancing over her shoulder several times to see if Garwood had followed her. She couldn't see him. She walked a little faster.

She spotted Kevin before her. He was sitting outside a small cafe with metal tables and chairs set up outside, and with potted Santhanam hung below the cafe sign, Barfly. She waved at him from across the street, hurried over and sat with him.

An empty coffee cup and several stubbed out cigarettes littered the table.

"You smoke?" She smiled, pulling out a chair opposite.

"Not if I can help it," he grinned. "Juice?"

She nodded.

Kevin ordered a fresh juice for her.

She gulped it down and wiped her top lip. "You remembered?"

"How could I forget?" He beamed. He remembered that she loved orange juice. When they lived in the orphanage, he used to buy her cartons of juice, mints, chocolates, and crisps from the money he earned drawing portraits along the pavement under the boiling sun. He reached out and held her hand.

"Savannah," he said, sounding nervous. "Devin, let me go because you did something, right?"

Savannah choked back some juice. "What? No! I wouldn't- "

Kevin's face hardened. He'd always been able to see through her.

She sighed. "I went and asked him to stop. That's all."

"How did you do it?"

She looked down into her lap. An image of Devin flashed before her eyes, being on her knees, putting her hands on his hard part, and him erupting up and down on her delicate hands. Wrenching into a dirty flannel and rinsing her hands several times. Tears.

"Savannah?"

She lifted her head and fixed his gaze. "I- I just bought him some gifts - a basket of fruit and an expensive watch. I begged him to leave you alone as a favor to me, his fiance, and he agreed." She was determined that he'd believe her.

Kevin remained silent, his gaze boring deep into her. "You're lying, aren't you?"

"No, I-"

"Tell me the truth!" Exasperated, he gripped her hand tightly. "Dylan mediated in the middle, didn't he?"

She blinked in rapid succession, surprised that he'd found out her arrangement with Dylan, but decided to give him something, to keep him from theory's secrets he might dredge up.

She nodded.

"Why would Dylan help you? What did you offer him?"

"Nothing. I gave him nothing!" She was panicking now. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. He was supposed to care for her, look after her, not question her, and make her feel this way - guilty. "I just told Dylan that it wouldn't look good. I-If Sterling- If the media got ahold of the story. It would look bad for them." She stammered, constructing the lie as she spoke. "He agreed and- and he decided to help you!"

Kevin banged the table with his fist. "Dammit, Savannah, stop lying to me!" He croaked. Tears caught in the corners of his eyes. "He never does anything for anyone unless he can gain something in return. Just..." His eyes were glistening pools of blue, begging her to open up to him. "Please be honest with me." He said quietly.

She didn't know what to do. She couldn't tell him. He would never speak to her again. She looked around, picked up her bag. "I've got to go, I forgot, I have to be home to help my uncle."

Before Kevin could respond, she stood up and hurried down the street.

"Savannah!" Kevin chased after her through the crowd of people.

Savannah ran to the side of the road and waved down a taxi when her arm was caught by Kevin. Looking back, she saw Kevin's anxious face.

"Savannah, remember what I told you at the orphanage? You don't have to bare everything alone. I'm always here. What on earth have you done to help me? Tell me!"

Somebody shoved past her, forcing her into his arms. Looking up at Kevin's face, she was almost on the point of telling him everything when she saw pain and sadness in his eyes.

Just then, the driver urged, "Hey, you get in or not? Don't waste my time."

Savannah pushed herself away and climbed into the taxi. She closed the door and forced a smile to face Kevin, "It's not what you think. Please, don't ask me about it again." Then she asked the driver to go before Kevin could utter a word.

The taxi pulled out into traffic and was lost from Kevin, and he cursed himself. He'd only wanted to help, and no, she was gone.

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It was dark when she returned to the villa.

Savannah felt awful, like a void, and split open in her chest and swallowed her heart. She walked up the drive and crept inside. The hallway was dark and only the grandfather clock disturbed the silence. She looked at the time on her phone. It was only nine o'clock. Judy shouldn't have gone to bed so early. "Judy?" She whispered. No one answered. She groped for the handrail and started to make her way up the stairs when a tall, dark figure blocked her way. She gave a sharp gasp. It was Dylan.

"You... What are you doing here?" She said, composing herself. Why not turn on the light? She was really freaked out. Was it necessary to be so economical?

"It's my house," Dylan said, his eyes catching the moonlight.

"But why are you standing in the dark like some kind of freak!" She said, stamping her foot.

He led her back down to the hallway and pulled open the curtain, flooding the space with pale moonlight. Turned to her and lifted her chin, examining her eyes in the dark. "Why are you so afraid? Have you done something wrong?"

"No! You can ask Judy."

"Where did you go today?" He whispered, his palm on the soft skin of her cheek and his thumb tracing the bow of her lips. She could sense the threat below the surface.

"I went shopping with the credit card Garwood gave me. I told Judy before going out."

"You went alone?" The interrogation went on, and his fingers continued rubbing against her skin, round and round.

She broke out in a cold sweat, "The downtown department store. Alone."

A wolfish grin spread across his face.