

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 501 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 501

Chapter 501

Uh?"

Quincy was about to ask what being a clean freak had to do with anything when she caught sight of her own hands and instantly got it. She tugged awkwardly at her lip. "Sorry, my bad."

She watched as Everett Lopez moved steadily forward, refusing to be assisted or to lean against the wall. His back remained ramrod straight as if bending was simply not an option.

Quincy knew all too well that Everett must be in agony. The trembling that barely perceptible in his silhouette was telltale. He'd been stabbed clean through with wounds both in the front and back, and his flesh and blood were indistinguishable when he was sent to hospital.

She recalled the first moments of taking charge of Everett. When he barely regained consciousness, his lips were moving. At first, Quincy thought he was moaning due to the pain and tried to comfort him for multiple times. But as she listened closely, he was actually calling out for Dorothy.

Sighing softly, Quincy felt a sudden, intense envy toward Dorothy.

"If only I could be loved like that," she mused.

Dorothy was still asleep when Everett returned to his hospital room.

He gazed at the small, huddled form on the bed, and his lips curled into a persistent smile.

He admitted to himself that he had put her through quite an ordeal.

Not wishing to disturb her rest, Everett picked up a chair and sat down beside the bed. He was content just to watch her sleep.

As he watched, the smile in his eyes deepened.

Honestly, he felt a bit like a creep!

But who could understand?

It was the thrill and elation of finally holding the moon he had longed for since his youth.

He had never imagined she could grow fond of him, let alone love. But now, with her lying next to him and willing to do anything for him, Everett feared this was just a dream.

He worried that maybe he'd died from the stab wound inflicted by Heather,

and all these were illusory.

Everett reached out and tentatively touched her arm that was placed near her cheek, then her eyebrows, her hair, wishing time could just stop right there.

He didn't know how long it has been before he heard a knock at the door.

Everett frowned involuntarily and glanced at the door monitor. Seeing it was Jeffrey, he pressed the remote to unlock the door.

Jeffrey had intended to come by and share some gripes about Karen. But upon entering, he saw Dorothy sleeping soundly, and

Everett, pale but looking lively, and he immediately got the picture.

"Step outside to talk?"

He gestured toward the small sitting chamber within the room.

Everett nodded. He pulled the covers up over Dorothy before he left.

As the door shut behind them, Jeffrey's immediately started to scoff. "Everett, aren't you indulging a bit much? Look at what

you've done to Dorothy. How long's she been sleeping?"

Everett never liked to discuss personal matters with others. To be precise, doing so freely in front of Dorothy was a recent hurdle he'd overcome.

"What do you want?"

"Why's your face all red?" Jeffrey wasn't going to miss an opportunity to rib Everett. He pointed at his flushed ears while laughing

uproariously, "Did I hit a nerve? How many times, huh?"

Everett furrowed his brow and tried to mask his embarrassment. "What do you really want?"

"Changing the subject with me, huh?" Jeffrey smirked, "Come on, I'm a guy, and I get it! Your buddy here's been pent up for long too. If you bring me a woman with a fine figure and pretty face right now, she'd probably end up just like Dorothy!"

Chapter 502

Everett glanced up, a hint of amusement touching his eyes. "So, that's why you harassed Karen, huh?"

At that accusation, Jeffrey looked like he was about to explode in protest.

"Whoa, hold up! It was totally her stirring the pot first! I was just... just trying to teach her a lesson, that's all! Her looks, her figure—they're not even my type."

"She's a friend of Dorothy's. You should back off."

Everett knew his friend all too well; this guy was more about lust than love. So he needed to make sure not to let Jeffrey hurt

Karen, otherwise it would put Dorothy in an awkward spot.

“Me, make a move on her?” Jeffrey’s expression was animated as he heard what Everett said, “Come on, man! When have I ever hung out with a girl who wasn’t miles hotter than her?”

“I don’t care about the others.”

“I’d go out with any of them than messing with Karen, man!”

Everett usually had no interest in Jeffrey’s dating life. But today, despite Jeffrey’s apparent disdain for Karen, he couldn’t help noticing that she was all Jeffrey talked about.

“Got a thing for her?”

Everett and Jeffrey were the kind of friends who cut straight to the chase.

“No way! Absolutely not!”

“Then keep your distance. Find another hotel. I’ll have someone sort it out for you.” Everett paused, then added, “Dorothy mentioned Karen’s heading back home soon.”

Once she was gone, their paths would likely never cross again.

Karen would continue with her life, and Jeffrey with his wild nights.

“No wonder she suddenly wanted to take in the sights. She’s leaving Jeffrey touched his nose, “Uh, I’m heading back. Need to take care of some business.”

“What’s the rush?”

“Work stuff, man! I’ve been out of the game for too long. Got a pile of things to sort out.”

Everett didn’t push it. He just nodded. “Go ahead.”

“See you! If I’m free tonight, I’ll swing by!”

Jeffrey waved and dashed off like a bat out of hell.

Everett, grimacing at the pain, slowly shuffled back to his previous spot and sat down.

The room was well-equipped with a sofa, a spare bed, even a separate caregiver’s room—all more comfortable than the chair.

But sitting in the chair was the only way to stay close to Dorothy.

Now that he was alone, he pulled out his phone and started sifting through the complicated mess Kevin couldn’t handle, all the while stealing glances at Dorothy.

Everett didn’t even realize was that he had a smile plastered on his face the entire time. Even when his cheeks felt stiff, he wouldn’t let it fade.

The information and documents Kevin had sent him weren’t as overwhelming as he expected. They were actually quite manageable.

Everett could imagine Kevin running around like a headless chicken, no

exaggeration.

[Mr. Lopez, are you recovered?"]

Kevin messaged as soon as he saw Everett online.

[Yeah]

(Can you let Ms. Sanchez know? She was asking me about you in tears. I didn't have much to tell her, and since your dad...]

Reading Kevin's message, Everett's gaze drifted back to Dorothy His eyes filled with an unspoken depth of emotion.

After a moment he replied (No need Dorothy's right here beside me]

Then he added a few more words: [She's sleeping]

[Ms Sanchez actually went abroad to find you?!]

[Yeah, this time she came to me on her own initiative.]

Chapter 503

Perhaps to others, the fact that Everett had saved Dorothy and she sought him out was nothing special.

But for Everett, that was an affirmation!

It meant that he had officially become someone Dorothy cared about.

The significance of that place in her heart was immense to him. He dared not even hope to occupy a large space there, as long as he wasn't kicked out.

Jeffrey rushed back to the hotel and paced back and forth outside Karen's door for ages without knocking.

He wasn't sure what he feared. For the first time, he felt a entanglement of emotions.

He never felt this anxious even back when he had a crush on Heather.

Suddenly, the door swung open!

Jeffrey looked up startled, and their eyes met. His mind went blank, unable to conjure up anything to say. "What are you doing

here?" Karen asked, freshly showered and changed, about to take a walk.

Without Jeffrey's car, she planned not to stray too far, just to make sure she could find her way back.

But as soon as she opened the door, there he was!

"... ..." Jeffrey stammered. Words failed him.

Karen thought he was gearing up for another argument and tempted to shut the door!

Jeffrey quickly blocked it with his hand.

This time Karen didn't hold back, slamming the door so hard right on Jeffrey's hand. He yelped in pain.

"Are you insane? I'm injured here!"

“A few more bruises won’t make much difference. Compared to what Heather went through, I’m really being gentle to you.”
Jeffrey was immediately at a loss for words.

Karen glared at him. “Move your hand! Or I’ll break it and don’t you dare blame me!”

“I won’t move it.” Despite the throbbing pain, Jeffrey insisted blocking the door from closing. “I have something to discuss with you, something important.”

“You’ve got nothing important to say.” she stated flatly.

“I know you are leaving, so I come to offer you a ride to show you around. Why do you always have to think the worst of people? How do I not have anything important?”

Jeffrey found that this woman always managed to provoke him easily. Women usually flock to him like fish swimming downstream. When had he ever had to grovel like this?

But Karen, she acted as if she was untouchable, as if she were some lofty rich lady!

“Oh, that won’t be necessary.” Karen replied coldly.

After witnessing his indecent behavior, Karen suddenly became aware that she was dealing with an adult male. She was even relieved that Jeffrey was only teasing her. Here all alone in this foreign land, even Dorothy, who had Everett for protection, was still struggling with the Lopez family. If Karen were to be bullied, she wouldn’t even know who to turn to.

So she decided to keep her distance from Jeffrey. It was better not to trouble herself or cause any for Dorothy.

This sudden change in Karen’s attitude was a shock to Jeffrey! He suddenly found that he missed the old Karen who could banter with him.

“Aren’t you afraid of getting lost?”

‘No‘

“Swevia Country isn’t the safest, you know! If you get kidnapped, no one will be able to save you.”

Karen stopped in her tracks, then said, “Fine, if it’s that unsafe, then I won’t go out. Take your hand back, I’m closing the door.”

Not going out anymore?

‘Come on! I’ll accompany you. With me around, they wouldn’t dare=’

“Hand! Take it back!” Karen cut him off firmly.

Chapter 504

“Hey! What’s the deal, lady? I’m already compromising!”

Did he really have to kneel or something?

“Who the hell am I to you? No need for the sweet talk.” Karen just wanted to keep her distance from Jeffrey before she left

Swevia Country for good

She had her rant and almost broke his hand – the revenge was done!

She never thought she’d have anything to do with Jeffrey, a spoiled rich kid.

Once she was back home, they were as different as night and day.

But to Jeffrey, her words rang differently. He knew this game all too well!

Many women had tried the same tactic when they wanted more from him, saying things like, “What am I to you, that you should

care?” or “On what grounds do you get to tell me what to do?”

So Jeffrey raised an eyebrow, instantly catching on to her so-called ‘hint’.

“If you want to be my girlfriend or something, just say it straight. No need to beat around the bush.”

“I think your head’s screwed on wrong!” Karen’s face cracked, and her eyes rolled as she sized up Jeffrey with a mix of disdain

and pity, “Me, your girlfriend? Take a good, hard look in the mirror–no, even if you’re easy on the eyes, I wouldn’t settle for what

Heather has abandoned!”

Heather’s leftovers?

Disgusting. No, thank you.

Jeffrey was getting frustrated too, “Can we please stop talking about Heather?”

Karen shrugged, “It’s the truth, isn’t it? Didn’t you go after her?”

“I did not! Absolutely not!” He had never pursued her, never even thought about being her boyfriend.

Jeffrey knew all too well how much Heather was into someone else – Everett.

“So you never even had a crush on her?”

Karen rolled her eyes, “I wouldn’t touch anything Heather has laid her hands on, be it things or people. So, drop your narcissism!

Sure, I thought you were pretty good–looking on the plane, but getting to know you? It’s just a pretty face. There’s nothing about you other than that face that attracts me one bit.”

“You-”

“I know, you lack female company. Maybe it’s just not convenient here in Swevia Country, but I have no intention of being your

disposable girlfriend! If you’re that desperate, just go out to fetch some or go

for prostitutes as long as you don't set your sights on me."

Karen wasn't silly to think his interest in her was genuine. She had seen firsthand how pent up he was today! Suddenly coming over to talk about being his girlfriend it was clear what was on his mind. Even though she was no innocent little girl and wasn't against a mutually beneficial fling, Jeffrey was absolutely a no-go.

The fact that he had liked Heather made him completely nasty in Karen's book.

Jeffrey stood there and stunned by her tirade. His mouth was agape but completely at a loss for words.

"Is there anything else?" Karen felt she had said her piece, and it was time for this guy to leave.

But he was still there, leaning on the door frame. The imprint from the slam was still visible on his hand. He showed no sign of leaving.

"You-1- Jeffrey stammered, finally squeezing out, "I never go for prostitutes!"

"Oh, good to know Karen shrugged, "And then?"

"I came here to ask you out for a walk, that's all! What's with all this mess? Karen, be sane, will you? At least I have taken you out for food when you were hungry here. I've done all you've asked of me these past days. Do you really have to be this harsh on me?"

Chapter 505

Sometimes, Jeffrey couldn't help but wonder what he had done to rub Karen the wrong way from the get-go.

Sure, he might have gotten off on the wrong foot with Dorothy, but that was all down to misunderstanding and a touch of self-interest. Time had moved on, and Dorothy had let it slide So why was Karen still on his case?

His words, however, seemed to strike a chord of guilt in Karen.

She took a deep breath, her tone softening significantly. "Look, I think there's no need to mingle with you since we will be strangers in the future. If my words come off harsh, just bear with them, alright? It's not like you have much of a choice anyway, considering you won't be seeing me around anymore." The finality in her 'you won't be seeing me anymore' left Jeffrey with an uncomfortable twinge in his heart.

It wasn't overt, but the feeling was there.

"Why wouldn't I see you? We're both in Eldorria City, he countered.

"If I don't want to see someone, I won't see them," she snapped, leaving no room for argument and not sparing Jeffrey's feelings one bit.

He had never been one to take such slights lying down. With a defiant twist of his heart, he withdrew his hand, "Fine, then let's not see each other ever again! It's not like I wanted to see you anyway!"

With that, he spun on his heel and stormed back to his room.

Karen watched his retreating figure, which seemed to be sulking and snorted. "Psycho!"

Dorothy woke up that afternoon feeling like she'd been put through a wringer every bone in her body ached.

"You awake?" Everett, who had been working on his laptop beside her bed, immediately put his work aside as he caught her moving.

"Yeah." Dorothy propped herself up, noticing that Everett had simply pulled up a chair to work at her bedside. Irritation flared within her. "When did you wake up? How could you get out of bed by yourself?"

Everett replied with a soft chuckle, "I never slept."

Dorothy gasped.

"You must be hungry. I'll have something brought up for us." He added.

Dorothy sighed in exasperation, "Just lie down first before you worry about me!"

"Just a few more projects to review, then I'll rest," he said, nodding at the laptop screen cluttered with text.

Dorothy knew his presence here was delaying important work back home, but nothing was more crucial than his health.

"How about this: you lie down, and I'll read them out to you, okay?"

Everett looked into her eyes for a few seconds before nodding in agreement, "Sounds good."

She helped him back into bed with tender care, mindful not to jostle his wounds. Once he was settled, she took her place in front of the computer.

Just as she was about to read, something occurred to her.

"This contract... it has a confidentiality clause, right? Is it okay for me to see it?"

"You can see everything of mine," he teased.

Dorothy was taken aback. Lately, his sweet talk caught her off guard and made her blush.

She cleared her throat and focused on the document, but paused.

“A new project in Snowfall City?”

“Yes.”

“It must be gorgeous there in winter when it snows!” Dorothy had seen snow but never visited Snowfall City, only glimpsing it in photos featuring its Central Avenue and the iconic Sophia Cathedral. Everett’s eyes softened, his clean cut hand was reaching out to hold hers. Then when Snowfall City is blanketed in snow, I’ll take you there.”

Dorothy stiffened, and her expression became uneasy.

They wouldn’t make it to the snowfall. She thought.

Yet she forced a smile to feign excitement, “Really? That’d be wonderful I’ll pack lots of down jackets.”

“Dorothy”

“Mhm?”

Everett’s gaze flickered with a promise, “I WILL take you there”

Chapter 506

Dorothy glanced into his eyes, the corners of her lips curving into an uneasy smile.

“I trust you, you know.”

“As long as you do, that’s all that matters.”

“Yeah.”

Dorothy shifted her gaze away pretending to focus on the computer screen. But her vision was getting more and more blurred.

As her tears threatened to spill, she stood up in panic and turned her back to Everett, “Oh, I just remembered I haven’t washed my face after waking up. I’ll go freshen up!”

No sooner had Dorothy stepped into the restroom than the door opened again.

Quincy, concerned about Everett’s injury—more about Everett himself—made a habit of checking in.

He walked in to find Everett alone in bed and paused, “Where’s Ms. Sanchez?”

“She’s washing up.”

“Ah.” Quincy stepped closer, slipping on medical gloves and began to inspect the wound with professional attentiveness.

Whether the patient was someone from the Lopez family or not, Quincy always maintained her compassion as a doctor.

Having lived abroad for so long, and with an elder brother to inherit her family estate, Quincy had learned to be content in any situation. She never really longed for romance, content with the thought of

remaining single for life. But witnessing the connection between Everett and Dorothy, she began to reconsider the idea of love.

She mused if a guy like Everett were to fancy her, she'd probably say yes. When Dorothy returned, she was greeted by the sight of Everett on the bed with Quincy carefully tending to his injuries and offering gentle reminders now and then.

A thought struck her; if Everett had feelings for Quincy, maybe the Lopez family had thrown a grand wedding by now to welcome her with open arms.

Maybe Amanda wouldn't favor Heather as much either.

"Ms. Sanchez." Quincy's voice snapped Dorothy out of her reverie.

"Hmm?" Dorothy quickly refocused, "What is it?"

Quincy nodded towards Dorothy's pocket, "Your phone's been ringing. Didn't you hear it?"

Dorothy gasped. Then, with an awkward smile, Dorothy excused herself and stepped out with her phone.

Looking at the screen, she saw it was Maxton Sanchez calling. She hung up without a second thought—she had nothing to discuss with him. But Maxton, who looked like a crazy man, kept calling back over and over again. Dorothy frowned as her frustration peaked, and she finally picked it up.

"Spit it out, what do you want?"

"That's no way to talk to your father!" Maxton's, tone was as accusatory as ever.

Dorothy wasn't in the mood for wasting time, "I'm hanging up if there's nothing important."

"I do have something!" Maxton's voice was tinged with desperation, "Have you seen your sister lately? I can't reach her, and your mom's worried sick. Thought you might help me find her."

So, he was looking for Heather.

"I've seen her."

"Where is she?"

"In a warehouse. Your precious daughter has kidnapped my friend and my kid."

Maxton paused and sounded totally disbelieving, "I'm serious here!"

"I'm not joking either." Dorothy's voice was icy, "I just regret not having the power to tear her to pieces. And here you are asking me for her?!"

Heather had endangered Everett and pushed him close to death. If it weren't

for Amanda's people whisking her away, Dorothy would have sought vengeance even if it meant going to Jail herself!

"How did you become a person like that? And you also want to kill your own sister, huh? Is this how Bella raised you?" Disgust dripped from Maxton's words.

Chapter 507

"Zip it, you've got no right to talk about my mom!"

"Who are you yelling at?" Maxton had lost his patience too. "If it weren't for the fact that I couldn't find Heather, do you think I'd bother calling you? Every time you open your mouth, it's either complaining about me or blaming your sister. She's been singing your praises to me, trying to mend fences between us, and yet you're always at her throat!"

Dorothy took a deep breath to keep from exploding with anger.

"She's been speaking well of me? And what good has that done? Did it make our relationship any better?"

She could see right through Heather's little games. Compliments laced with subtle digs were her specialty.

"That's because you're so damn stubborn. What's that got to do with your sister? You're really spoiled by your mom!"

"Then why didn't you raise me? Why weren't you around when I was a kid, huh? Where were you when I needed money? Did you care about what I wore or ate?"

"How did I not? It was your mom who told me to stay away!"

Dorothy laughed sarcastically, "Well, Heather must really be your flesh and blood. You both have a talent for making excuses. If you're looking for Heather, well, you've got the wrong person. And you better hope I don't find her!"

"What do you mean?"

"I'll see to it that your baby daughter ends up behind bars. I swear I will!"—
With that, she hung up and immediately blocked Maxton's number.

People like him shouldn't even be in her orbit; they were just an eyesore. Despite her harsh words, Dorothy couldn't help but smirk as she put her phone back in her pocket.

They were both his daughters, yet the difference between them was night and day!

Heather was the illegitimate one, but how did that matter? As long as Maxton favored her, she could steal all the fatherly love.

But luckily, Dorothy didn't need it anymore.

Had this been in the past, she would have ended up crying after a shouting match with Maxton, though she couldn't quite say why since she should've given up on him as a father long ago. But now, her eyes were bone dry.

She just wished she could be the one to bring Heather down.

When Dorothy returned to the hospital room, Quincy was still busy preparing the potions and chatting away with Everett.

Well, to be precise, it was more like a monologue. Everett's gaze fixed on the door, waiting for Dorothy's return and occasionally grunting in response.

"Jonathan invited my dad for a hike the other day, and Mom said he came back reeking of booze. No idea what kind of 'hiking' that was. Whenever those two get together, it's booze central! Oh? Ms. Sanchez, you're back." Quincy looked up and waved naturally at Dorothy.

"Yeah," she nodded. She was suddenly unsure how to face Quincy so she just managed a tight smile, "Dr. Quincy, how is he doing?"

"He's stable and got no major issues! But you really need to keep an eye on him. Mr. Lopez looks so stoic and quiet, but he's a handful when left alone. I don't get it. The moment he's out of my sight, his wound is bound to bleed!"

Dorothy knew the reason behind that all too well. She cleared her throat, "I'll take good care of him."

"That's good to hear. I'll head back to my office then. Don't forget to come by later for the medication application," Quincy said warmly and patted Dorothy's shoulder before leaving.

As the door closed behind Quincy, Everett spoke in a low voice, "What were you thinking about when you were standing still at the door?"

"No, nothing at all! Did you sort out the company stuff? I can keep reading the contracts to you."

"Are you jealous of that female doctor? Everett raised an eyebrow "if that's the case, I can always get a male doctor instead."

Chapter 508

"Stop!" Dorothy waved her hands frantically, "It was Dr. Quincy's skill that saved you. She's a wizard in the medical world.

Without Dr. Quincy, you'd still be living on the line!"

Her thoughts before didn't meant to target Quincy at all!

It was just admiration, pure and simple.

Deep down, Dorothy harbored a sense of inferiority, viewing herself as nothing more than dirt on the ground. So when Everett fell for her, it was a shock to her system.

“The Lopez family pays her a salary.” Everett wasn’t too hung up on it. As a physician at the Lopez Private Hospital, it was only natural for Quincy to treat patients; it was part of her job description! At most, they could give her a bonus for a job well done. Just like with Heather. Amanda kept reminding Heather of her enormous sacrifices for the Lopez family, praising her dedication and single-minded focus. But as far as Everett was concerned, Heather had already been compensated for her work. It was her job, after all.

“Don’t get the wrong idea. I’m not jealous,” Dorothy insisted, worried he might actually change his doctor. “I swear!”

Everett, however, was not satisfied with her response. His handsome face became a bit somber.

“Not jealous?”

“Right! I’m really not! In fact, I’m grateful to Dr. Quincy for saving you.”

“Dorothy, you mean to tell me that you feel nothing when you see other women around me?”

She blinked, taking a moment to grasp the full meaning of his words..

“Everyone socializes, right? And in social circles, there are men and women.

Am I supposed to demand that you, a big shot CEO, cut off all contact with the opposite sex?”

“But when I see men around you, I get jealous.”

Dorothy widened her eyes.

“Whether it’s Kenneth, Lane, or maybe others I don’t know about, I get jealous of them all.”

Now Everett, usually so distinguished and genteel, spoke with the petulance of a child.

“Then go ahead and put me under house arrest. That’ll end my social life completely.”

“I’ve thought about it.”

Dorothy was shocked again.

His eyes were serious and earnest, “I’ve really thought about it.”

But he dared not go through with it.

The two exchanged a long look before Everett let out a soft sigh.

He couldn’t let her know the full extent of his feelings all at once. He had to reveal it slowly, like chipping away at an iceberg:

otherwise, the look in her eyes a moment ago suggested she was already

plotting her escape.

Back in his own room, Jeffrey stripped off his clothes and dove into bed, grumbling to himself.

He was too tired to play the part of some eager lackey groveling for approval. Better to stay away!

As he was about to fall asleep, his phone rang at the most inconvenient time. Jeffrey, shirtless and irritated, sat up and snatched the phone. It was Lane, "What's up?" he barked.

"What's with the tone?" Lane sounded sloppy as usual, but this time he feigned his nonchalance.

Lane, who was out of the loop, could only hope to get some information through Jeffrey.

"Nothing. I'm tired."

"Oh. I heard you dashed off to Swevia Country right after waking up?"

"Yeah."

Lane paused, his voice rising a notch, "Dorothy went to Swevia Country too, right? To see Everett?"

"Yeah." Jeffrey responded reflexively, then remembered who Lane was. "Wait a second, you're not still hung up on Dorothy, are you? She's back with Everett now and they're inseparable."

"They've really back together?"

"Why would I lie? Just give it up, man!"

Lane better be a lifelong bachelor like he did!

Lane chuckled, then took a moment before asking. "So, that person you kept mentioning before... what's her name, Heather?"

Are you still in touch with her?"

"Don't even mention her! Don't make a madman!"

Chapter 509

Jeffrey could feel his blood boil at the mere utterance of that name.

"What's the deal? You guys used to be thick as thieves, right?"

"She kidnapped Dorothy's kid and had it out for Dorothy. When she didn't get her loved one at last, she just stabbed Everett in a fit of madness and planned to go down with him!"

"You mean Heather?"

"Who else would I be talking about?"

Silence hung on Lane's end of the line, and just as Jeffrey was about to conclude the call had dropped, Lane rushed out,

"Something's come up, gotta run."

The abrupt end to the call only added to Jeffrey's irritation.

On Lane's end, his grip on his phone was precarious. He feared Jeffrey might discern something from his demeanor, so he hung up out of panic.

Lane had sensed something was off with Everett; otherwise, the Lopez Corporation wouldn't be sending a junior secretary to handle partnership meetings, and they wouldn't have locked down the City Hospital. Therefore, he assumed that Everett was injured.

Lane figured Dorothy, who vanished afterwards, had gone to Everett's side. But Lane had never in a million years imagined that Heather, of all people, would be the mastermind behind it all. So she really had the gall to kidnap Dorothy's daughter... but she had sworn to him that she wouldn't lay a finger on Dorothy or her kids!

No wonder he couldn't get through to Dorothy; Heather, that madwoman, must've spilled the beans about him!

"Damn it, how could I be so stupid?!" Lane cursed and hurled his phone. The screen was instantly shattered and blanking out.

Grabbing his suit jacket and car keys, he stormed over to Heather's place. But no one answered his relentless knocking or the doorbell, which was just like the silence he got from calling her number.

Lane wasn't going to stand for it. He was being sidelined before he even had a chance to act. He had a whole plan laid out and all Heather needed to do was play along.

Driving back home, deflated, Lane saw his secretary waiting anxiously at his doorstep. She was obviously bearing bad news.

Stepping out of the car, Lane approached, "What's up?"

Seeing Lane, the secretary looked on the verge of tears, "I couldn't reach you by phone, so I had to come. Disaster struck. The president of the Lopez Corporation tanked East Star Enterprises' stock to rock bottom and announced its dissolution out of the blue."

Lane was shocked to hear what she said!

"Your shares had taken such a hit that they are not even worth a tenth of what they were when you acquired them."

That meant all his years of toil had evaporated overnight into meaningless numbers.

Everett played hardball by leaving him no room to breathe and aiming straight for the jugular.

"Mr. Lane, what do we do now?"

Fists clenched in fury, Lane was at the brink of rage. But then, his anger

subsided a little.

He wouldn't burn his bridges like what Heather, that moron did. If he thought it through, there had to be a way to bite them back.

hard.

Patience. His time would come.

Laid up in the hospital, Everett had to delegate much of his workload to Kevin. This unexpected downtime gave him a rare opportunity to mentor Dorothy hands-on.

"Why the due diligence is riddled with problems every time I think I've done a thorough work? Is there a way to make sure the other party doesn't dare to decelve?" Dorothy was poring over contracts on his laptop in search of their patterns.

"You want to know the secret?"

"Absolutely!"

Everett chuckled, "And what's in it for me?"

Chapter 510

Dorothy locked eyes with Everett's smirking gaze and she really got nothing to say.

"What more do you want, huh?"

At this rate, with the daily demands, Dorothy was seriously questioning if she'd make it out of this hospital alive.

"You know exactly what," he teased.

"But you said you just need once today!"

Everett shrugged, "Well, you wanted to learn new things. So if you're upping the game, I need to up the reward."

"Forget it. I'm done learning."

She'd rather face the grim reaper anywhere but in a hospital bed.

Watching her almost physically recoil at the suggestion, Everett couldn't help but smirk, "By the way, I was thinking of bringing

Langston and Abigail over."

Though still bedridden, he figured having the kids around might speed his recovery, not to mention it would ease Dorothy's mind about the goings-on back in the home country.

Truth be told, he had nearly drained Dorothy's power the last couple of days.

His appetite wasn't fully satiated, but he had to

consider her limits. Now that his desire had somewhat abated, so his thoughts turned to the kids, especially little Abigail.

He still owed that girl a fiver!

"Is that what your dad wants?" Dorothy asked instinctively, assuming

Jonathan was becoming impatient.

“Our kids, our decision. He’s got nothing to do with it.”

“How can you say that? He’s their grandfather,” she protested. That was a fact that would never change.

Just like Amanda and Jonathan, who would always be Everett’s parents.

“But Abigail and Langston are ours,” Everett spoke soothingly, trying to quell the unease in her heart. “Where they are and who they’re with these are up to us to decide.”

“Yeah, Everett, I’ve always known you’d be a great dad.” She had seen firsthand the kind of man he was. Especially the joyous harmony between him and Langston, which she witnessed, was something she, as his biological mother, could only aspire to.

She felt guilty for the time she wasn’t there for them, particularly Langston. The more understanding he became, the heavier her guilt weighed.

“Of course! And you’re the best mom they could ever have.”

Dorothy suddenly looked up and met Everett’s gaze. She bit her lip, and after a long pause, she finally spoke with a husky voice,

“Can you promise me something?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, he nodded, “Anything.”

“No matter... no matter what happens to us and to your parents, just always protect Abigail and Langston well and love them as much as you can. Even if... I mean, if we’re not, together, if we split for good, or if you find someone new and have other kids, don’t treat Abigail and Langston any differently, okay?”

Everett’s handsome face darkened in an instant.

Her words sounded like a last testament.

“As long as you don’t push me away, we won’t split up.”

“I’m talking hypothetically! I mean “if so“. Don’t you get it?”

Dorothy tried to mask her concern with a laugh, but Everett’s expression remained grave.

There are no “if so,”

“I just want you to promise me. Is that so hard? People change so nobody can predict the future. Okay, even If we stay together, everyone has to face life and death, and you can’t stop that. Suppose I die, promise me you’ll treat each of your kids with the same love, can you do that?”

Everett was silent for a few seconds, his deep eyes locked onto hers. Slowly, he said, "I won't have any other kids. When I get out of here, I'm getting a vasectomy."

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Chapter 511

Dorothy's pupils contracted sharply, and she blurted out, "No way!"

"I have Abigail and Langston and that's enough for me."

He had never dared to hope that he could have children with Dorothy, let alone twins! Everett wanted nothing more. Dorothy had no doubt about his sincerity indeed. But she was absolutely not okay with what he was gonna do.

"Everett, you've got decades ahead of you. Let's not make life-altering decisions too hastily."

The future was too far off to fathom.

What if Everett fell for someone else down the line? He was outstanding and shining bright like the sun, always the center of attention wherever he went. In the long years ahead, surely a perfect match would appear for him. If they were stuck with a hasty decision made today and unable to have more children, that would be a huge regret.

"Are you planning on having another one?" Everett asked with a casual arch of his brow, "I'm just worried about the burden that'll bring you."

"I didn't mean me having another!"

"Then who else would I have a child with?" Everett's tone shifted from teasing to a trace of irritation, "Who are you trying to set me up with?"

It had been a long while since Dorothy had seen him angry. She looked down instinctively, her lips muttering an attempt at an explanation, only to feel she had nothing to justify.

"If I could let go of you, why would I spend years trapping myself in place and enduring the suffering?"

Everett wanted to move on as well. Countless nights he had to rely on his memories of the past, just to make it through to dawn.

Countless times had he frantically searched Bay Residence for any trace of Dorothy. The sheets she'd slept in, the pillow she'd

used, the clothes she left behind, and the dishes she'd used – Everett had carefully preserved them all.

It was as if Dorothy had never truly left with those items kept by him..

But Dorothy didn't know any of this. That was why she could say such things.

"I'm sorry." Dorothy's voice was hoarse with apology, "I thought you were ready to start fresh when you had the tattoo removed."

When she saw the bite mark but no tattoo, she assumed that Everett had moved on. He just happened to run into her again.

"I did want to start over because waiting for you was too painful," Everett revealed his chest tattoo, urging her to take a closer look, "I tried to get it removed, but I overestimated my own restraint. I couldn't handle not having this sequence of numbers on my skin, so I had it tattooed on again."

Those numbers had been with Everett for over a decade. After having them removed, he couldn't even bear to look in the mirror while blow-drying his hair!

It was too unsettling that the feeling drove him mad.

As Dorothy's gaze fixed on the tattoo, she could clearly see the signs of it being redone.

She couldn't help but reach out and stroke the slightly raised skin, struggling to imagine the turmoil of having it removed and then redone.

"Getting a tattoo over the scarred skin must hurt more, right?"

"Not at all. Whether it was the first time or the second, I was just happy."

It felt to him like she had come back.

Back into his body.

How could he not be happy?

"Everett, have you already got so puerile in middle school? Weren't you afraid of your parents finding out?" Back then, tattoos were a big taboo for students.

Getting caught by the school meant serious consequences.

"No one knew about it and you hadn't said yes to me as well. So what was there to show off?"

Chapter 512

Dorothy paused as her eyes widened with disbelief, "And when you played basketball..."

"There's a thing in this world called Band-Aids."

"You're quite the daredevil, you know. Back in middle school, you were just a teenager! Tattoos are forever. How could you be so

sure we'd meet again when we grew up?"

At the end of the day, it was just youthful naivety, wasn't it? The impulsiveness of a teenager!

"I never thought that far ahead. When you returned the letters I wrote you, I thought it was your way of saying no." So after that, he didn't dare to think about their future.

"You thought I rejected you, yet you kept the tattoo?"

"Dorothy, don't question my loyalty."

He had never been swayed by anyone else, so why would he remove the tattoo?

"So, do you have any idea how I felt when I got that text from you?" he asked. Dorothy blinked in confusion, "What text?"

"The one where you asked for some 'movie'. You said you wanted to see them."

Dorothy froze on the spot, her eyes desperately searching for an escape route.

But Everett, holding her hand placed on his tattoo, wouldn't let her go.

"You finally asked for something, I figured. Although I don't have those 'movie', I could give you a live demo."

Her face was now a shade of red that could rival a ripe tomato, and her hand was still firmly in his grip, unable to retract it.

"I was asking Karen for them. And how did you immediately know what 'movie' meant?"

Everett let out a reluctant chuckle, "I don't mess with women, but I haven't taken a vow of celibacy."

"So, you watch that stuff too?"

"Occasionally. Jeffrey forces it on me."

"I knew it!" Jeffrey, Everett's buddy, was just like Karen to her!

Speaking of Karen, Dorothy realized she needed to make some arrangements for her.

After all, Karen had traveled miles to be here. It wouldn't be fair to just leave her to her own devices while she spent time with Everett.

"How about I invite Karen over for dinner tonight? Is that okay?"

"You call the shots." Everett had no objections.

He was grateful to Karen, after all. He knew how much she looked after Dorothy, and of course, he would have been even more grateful if Kenneth wasn't her cousin.

"Great, then I'll shoot Karen a message!"

Everett nodded, "She's never been to Swevia Country before, right? I can

arrange for someone to show her around for a few days before she heads back.”

“I’ll ask her what she wants to do when she gets here.” Dorothy paused, then added, “And... If you see Jeffrey again, could you explain that Karen isn’t mean-spirited? She’s just really protective of me. I want to apologize on her behalf since she said something really harsh.”

Despite her lukewarm feelings for Jeffrey, she knew she owed him thanks for looking after Karen in Swevia Country.

“He deserved the scolding. There’s no need to apologize.”

Dorothy was taken aback, “Did something happen between them?”

Had she missed something in her deep slumber?

Everett chose his words carefully, “Karen called you earlier. You were asleep, so I picked it up.”

“And?”

“She said... Things got physical between her and Jeffrey.”

Dorothy’s jaw dropped, “Are you saying they-”

Everett quickly clarified, “Nothing serious happened, just that Jeffrey’s been in the hospital so long. He was used to being a ladies’ man so now he was uncomfortable with no women around. So, seeing Karen, he got some bad ideas. Don’t worry, I’ve already given him a talking-to, telling him to stay away from your friend.”

Dorothy pursed her lips, finding the whole situation rather baffling, “Karen laid into him so fiercely, and he still had the nerve to try- something on her?”

Chapter 513

Everett couldn’t care less about curiosity and gossip. His concerns were far more immediate.

“Hey, you’re not mad at me over this whole mess, are you?” he asked tentatively.

She didn’t reply.

“Jeffrey is always so impulsive and he’s a man who speaks before he thinks like he’s never grown up. Don’t be mad, okay? He picked on your friend, but I’ll make it right.”

Dorothy couldn’t help but smile at the hasty earnestness in his eyes.

“I never said I’d drag you into this! I know my bestie. She can handle herself.” With a mouth like Karen’s, she could run circles around Jeffrey in a verbal showdown.

The moment Everett mentioned he was treating her to dinner, Karen was all

in.

Who could say no to a feast of delicacies?

And Everett was nothing if not sincere, even arranging a limo to pick her up from the hotel.

Holding a bag of groceries and stepping inside, Karen gave a dry smile, “Just swung by a fruit stand. I couldn’t understand a word they were saying so I just grabbed what I could recognize. Can’t visit a patient empty-handed, right?”

She knew all about proper etiquette!

With a sigh, Dorothy laughed, “I could get used to the sudden etiquette of yours.”

Karen squinted playfully and strolled over to Everett’s hospital bed, “Mr. Lopez, feeling better?”

“Yeah,” Everett nodded.

“Good, good. With you looking after Dorothy, I can head back home without worrying. Otherwise, my brother-”

Karen caught herself mid-sentence, slamming the brakes on that thought.

“It’s fine. I know he’s good to Dorothy,” Everett smoothly carried on the conversation.

She gave an awkward laugh, “Don’t get it twisted, Mr. Lopez. It’s all one-sided. Dorothy never said yes. Her heart’s always been with you.”

“Karen!” Dorothy couldn’t bear it any longer. Fearing Karen might let slip something even more untoward, she quickly cut in,

“Everett was thinking of showing you around Swevia Country. Interested?”

Karen was about to agree when she hesitated.

“Who’s the guide? It’s not Jeffrey, is it...?”

“It’s not him,” Everett assured her with a wry smile. “Don’t worry.”

“Thank goodness! A little sightseeing before I head back sounds perfect.

Thanks, Mr. Lopez. I’ll go with it as long as the guide isn’t Jeffrey

Before Everett could respond, his phone rang.

All eyes turned as the caller ID popped up—it was Jeffrey.

Everett answered and could clearly feel Jeffrey was outside, for the whoosh of wind was audible over the line.

“Everett, my folks called and they need me/back home. Looks like you’ve got things under control here so I can give Kevin a hand at the office.”

“Sure, I’ll arrange the flight,” Everett responded with a grave tone.

Jeffrey took a drag of his cigarette, “You sound weird. What’s up? You’re not

with Dorothy, are you...?”

“She brought Karen over for a meal at the hospital.”

“Karen’s with you?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m on my way.”

With that, Jeffrey hung up.

Everett tried calling back, but Jeffrey, as if anticipating what he was going to say, stubbornly refused to pick up.

Dorothy, noticing Everett’s change in demeanor, arched an eyebrow, “What’s up?”

“Jeffrey’s coming over. I’ve got someone trying to intercept him.”

“Why stop him?” Dorothy asked, puzzled..

Everett glanced at Karen, who suddenly got it and quickly waved her hands,

“No need! Mr. Lopez, Jeffrey and I just like to ruffle each other’s feathers. It’s not like we can’t even be in the same room! I’m still willing to share a meal with the guy, given his cute face.”

Chapter 514

“Sounds good. I was worried that you’d mind.”

Everett’s main concern was that Dorothy might think he was playing favorites with his buddies.

But Dorothy knew Karen’s temperament. She wasn’t one to hold grudges, especially not if the guy in question was easy on the eyes like Jeffrey. Karen’s tolerance certainly shot up when it came to handsome men! And if Jeffrey had really done something outrageous, Karen would’ve stormed the hospital by now instead of sitting quietly.

Calling it a hospital was a bit of a stretch; it was more like the Lopez family’s own private mansion.

Not only were the medical facilities top-notch, but they had even flown in a chef from back home!

For Karen, it was her first time seeing a hospital spread a feast like this, each dish a delightful assault on the senses. She

couldn’t help but marvel, “Rich folks live in a different world, huh? Way beyond my simple mind!”

Dorothy chuckled at her friend’s awe, “You’re drooling all over the table.”

Karen squinted her eyes and grinned from ear to ear, “This is quite the eye-opener. Next time if someone calls me plain, I’ll tell them I’ve dined with Mr. Lopez himself!”

“Quit your yapping and eat up,” Dorothy said as she pulled out a chair for Karen, just as the last of the dishes were served.

As soon as Karen reached for her cutlery, the door burst open.

They all looked up.

“Everett, you could’ve invited me, man! Why you didn’t tell me about such a feast?”

Without a second glance at Karen, he plopped down in the chair closest to Everett.

The atmosphere turned a tad awkward.

Jeffrey ignored Karen but turned to Dorothy instead, “Langston is your kid?”

Suddenly caught off guard, Dorothy offered a nervous smile, “Yeah.”

She felt a bit uneasy. She and Jeffrey weren’t exactly chummy, and their previous encounters had always been tense. Now, to be sharing a peaceful meal with him felt a bit surreal.

“He’s sharp as a tack!” Jeffrey had none of those reservations. He lit up at the mention of Langston, “Not only did he inherit Everett’s looks but his brains too. And let me tell you, Langston’s way more fun than his old man. Not stuck with a poker face all the time!”

Everett frowned slightly and shot him a look.

Dorothy knew what Langston was like. The boy who was always one step ahead was certainly a better match for Jeffrey’s

energy. “He’s into computers. He has been since he was a tot.”

“Smart and adorable!” Jeffrey exclaimed, slapping his thigh in excitement,

“Dorothy, I want one too. Have one for me, will you?”

Before Dorothy could respond, Everett glared at him, “Are you out of your mind?”

Jeffrey caught the warning in his tone and realized he’d spoken way out of line.

“No, no, I mean... why don’t you and Everett have another, and then you can give Langston to me! The kid’s practically my bro.

We get along great!”

Zippering her mouth, Dorothy glanced at Karen, who seemed unfazed by the conversation and calmly enjoying her meal.

“If you like kids that much, have your own,” Everett quipped, nipping Jeffrey’s idea in the bud.

Jeffrey pouted, “Me? I’m a bachelor for life! Who am I supposed to have kids with?”

Karen chimed in without missing a beat, “You think you’d have trouble finding a woman willing to have your kids?”

Chapter 515

“Come on, you can see me?” Jeffrey’s voice was laced with a provocation as he broke the silence.

Everett was about to retort, but Dorothy touched his arm, signaling that it was okay to let it slide.

“I’m not blind,” Karen said nonchalantly, continuing to eat her burger as if the exchange hadn’t affected her in the least. “Dorothy, this chef sure knows how to make a killer burger!”

“Good, then help yourself to some more,” Dorothy replied.

Jeffrey dropped his fork as his sight bore into Karen. He set his cutlery down with a clatter, “Didn’t you say you never wanted to see me again? So, I’ve been treating you like you’re not here.”

“That’s fine by me,” Karen replied, unfazed by his comment.

Her indifferent attitude was like a punch on a pillow for Jeffrey. He would have preferred a fiery exchange of words to this polite

restraint, which felt almost the stiffness she showed the first time they met.

Jeffrey opened his mouth to snap back, but Everett cut in with a frosty reminder, “Let’s eat, shall we?”

“Right.”

The meal was a quiet affair with everyone lost in their own thoughts; though Dorothy and Everett seemed more interested in the unfolding drama.

Karen suggested taking a walk with Dorothy after the meal to digest, which left Everett and Jeffrey alone in the room.

“Why do you always have to be at Karen’s throat?”

Even the usually oblivious Everett had picked up on the tension between the two.

Jeffrey slumped on the couch, pouting. “She’s just.... different from the other girls!”

In Eldorria City, Jeffrey was a catch—a man women chased after. He never had trouble wooing any woman. None of them would so much as raise their voice to him, let alone talk back.

Except for Karen. It was as if she couldn’t speak without challenging him.

“Just because she’s different?”

Everett never cared for Jeffrey’s fickle approach to relationships. But if the women were willing, it wasn’t his place to intervene—except when it came to Karen. She was Dorothy’s friend, and she had helped raise the kids for years. He had to step in.

“Oh come on, you don’t have to worry about me doing anything. I know you wouldn’t be able to face Dorothy if I got together with

Karen,” Jeffrey said, ruffling his hair in frustration. “But... heck, I’ll be honest with you. Life seems dull without someone like her to ‘argue with!’”

“You mentioned wanting to go back home during the phone call. Was that because you thought Karen had left?”

“Ah, you always embarrass me by guessing everything right,” Jeffrey groaned, covering his face. “I went to knock on her door, thinking I was too good to stoop to her level, but no one answered. The receptionist said she’d been picked up, and I thought she had...”

“Gone back to the home country.”

“Yeah.”

“She’s about to, actually.”

Jeffrey’s eyes widened, “When’s her flight?”

Everett shot a stern look at him, “Why do you want to know?”

“Just curious.”

“Well, don’t be.”

Suddenly, Jeffrey stood up, dragged a chair over to Everett’s bedside, and sat down with a conspiratorial air, “Everett, this feeling I have—wanting to yell at her when I see her, feeling empty when I don’t—is this what liking someone is?”

He had never felt this way before—not even with Heather.

His previous flings were straightforward: a casual hookup, a goodbye with a wad of cash, and a hope they wouldn’t cling to him afterward. But with Karen, why did it feel like the tables had turned?

Chapter 516

Jeffrey had never been one to stir trouble—except when it came to bickering with Karen. Ever since she had disrupted his peace that one time, any time he even thought about flirting with someone else, her face would pop up in his mind like a persistent ghost.

It left him unusually irritable, feeling as if there was some unfinished business nagging at him. I’ve never felt this way before.”

Everett’s approach to love was steadfast and enduring, so he wasn’t familiar with fleeting affections.

“You wouldn’t understand even if I explained it to you,” Jeffrey grumbled. “I’m thinking of hanging out with her again. Maybe I’m just intrigued because she’s so sharp-witted. Once I’m back home and surrounded by all the local beauties, I’ll probably forget all about her.”

“If that’s your attitude, you’d better stay away from her,” Everett warned, his brow furrowing deeper with each word Jeffrey said.

“If Dorothy comes after you for this, don’t expect me to have your back.”

“Come on, man! Are we friends or not?” Jeffrey scoffed at Everett’s attempt to wash his hands of the matter. “You’d really ditch me over a girl?”

Everett shot him a glance, “There are plenty of fish in the sea, but you just had to go for the one swimming around Dorothy. I wouldn’t care about any other girls you choose.”

“But Karen’s different! She’s interesting!”

Everett’s lips thinned, and he spoke with a seriousness that was rare for him, “Then will you marry her?”

Marry her?

Those words hit Jeffrey like a bucket of cold water!

He hadn’t even considered marriage, and now suddenly, it was on the table.

“Whoa, aren’t we jumping the gun here? I haven’t even got to first base with her!”

“If she agreed to be with you, would you marry her?” Everett pressed.

Jeffrey paused. He pondered for a moment, then shook his head, “No, I wouldn’t. The whole idea of marriage seems so dull to me. Why do two people need a piece of paper to tie them down? Then there’s the meddling in each other’s lives and shared responsibilities. Just thinking about them gives me a headache.”

“Then don’t step into her life.”

Everett figured Jeffrey was too set in his free-spirited ways to be suddenly reined in by commitment, let alone marriage. Even a stable relationship would probably be out of the question.

“Poof... so you think it’s a no-go between us too, huh?”

“It’s really about what you want. Everyone else’s opinions are just opinions.”

Jeffrey let out a long sigh, “Alright. But I really should be heading back home. The Lopez Corporation is a hot mess, and Kevin’s probably on the brink of a breakdown.”

“I’ve already taken over some of the workload. Once I’m back, I’ll give him a long vacation to unwind.” Everett answered. “Mm.

Jeffrey nodded, rising to his feet. “It’s getting dark. I’m out of here. You and Dorothy enjoy your cozy evening. I won’t intrude.”

Everett nodded

“Till see if Karen needs a lift back with me,

Everett was then speechless for their whole conversation was a waste of time. Outside, Dorothy and Karen had found a bench under the starry sky With

Karen's presence, a rare silence fell between them before Karen couldn't resist breaking it. "Have you... changed your mind?" Karen questioned.

Dorothy knew what she was getting at, "No"

Karen sighed deeply and sat up straight, "You know, I was really supportive of you finding out the truth. Your mother's death deserves justice, and the culprit should face the law. But seeing how much Everett cares for you, I can't help but wonder if it's cruel to him."

In the blink of an eye, your closest companion could turn into your fiercest adversary. Who could possibly cope with that? "Karen, as of now, Everett's mother shows no sign of remorse. She probably still thinks she got away with it by destroying all the evidence."

Chapter 517

His mother only felt disgust and contempt about her, not even a hint of guilt or remorse.

How could she convince herself to swallow this bitter pill?

The murderer could literally stand with an air of arrogance in front of the family of her victim as if she had done nothing wrong. It was as if she had never once reproached herself. Even the murder of Bella was no more significant than swatting a fly to her.

"That witch is truly despicable!" Karen understood Dorothy's predicament all too well, "But... she's sick, constantly in and out of the ER. She might kick the bucket before the law even touches her!"

Maybe it was worth the wait.

If she did pass away first, Dorothy and Everett wouldn't have to go head-to-head,

"Her death isn't the endgame. I want her to admit her guilt, to pay for her life!"

"But that's a hard way to go."

It wasn't just like trying to twist an arm with a leg; it was like David fighting Goliath! One wrong move and you'd be squashed.

"Karen, what I fear most isn't the Lopez family coming after me, it's Everett's eyes."

Just the thought of Everett's face when he found out his mother was being accused of murder after the video from Byte 7 was restored made her heart wrench with pain.

"What's there to fear? If Everett sides with his mom, then he's not worth it! It's not like you're framing the Lopezes – the evidence is there! An eye for an eye, why should his mother get away with murder?"

Dorothy forced a smile, "I'd rather he blames me when he finds out."

"Huh?" Karen was perplexed.

"Because then I wouldn't feel guilty. But I know Everett; he's not like that. He'll be devastated."

He didn't choose his parents.

But they had raised him, and his mother had gone through hell to bring him into this world in that delivery room; he couldn't completely ignore that.

"Once this whole mess blows up, regardless of the outcome, your feud with the Lopez family will be etched in public memory.

Even years later, people will talk, and you'll lose any chance of reconciling with Everett."

Dorothy smiled, "I'm aware of that."

"And you're still set on your decision?"

"I am."

"Alright then! I'll support you with all I've got, and so will Kenneth." Karen extended her hand and gave Dorothy a firm squeeze,

"If you think about it, we're only here for a few decades. How you live is up to you. Fighting for justice, uncovering the truth for your mom, that's a life too. It's not like romance love is the only way to carry on."

Karen had a unique way of offering support.

Dorothy stretched, resting her head on Karen's shoulder, "Karen, I'm going to win."

"Of course, you will! Because you're on the side of justice!"

"Yeah... I will win..." Under the starry night sky, she wiped away her tears and took a moment to steady her emotions, "This is the only time I can get along with Everett. I need to enjoy this month, then brace myself to bring Bella's true killer to justice."

"I'm with you all the way."

Even though Karen wasn't looking at her face, she instinctively reached into her pocket and handed Dorothy a tissue.

Chapter 518

Dorothy paused for a moment, then let out a light chuckle, "You really do get me, don't you?"

"Oh, come on! Just talking about this stuff makes me want to cry for you. There's no way you're not crying."

Clutching a tissue in her hand, Dorothy stood up, "Karen, when you go back, could you maybe talk to Kenneth? Tell him to stop

waiting for me and find himself a girlfriend. I can't hold him back any longer."

"That's tougher than taking down the Lopez family!" Karen rolled her eyes.

"Besides, leave him be. He knows what he's doing."

"Kenneth has done too much for me already."

"You are worried that Kenneth thinks you and Everett will be over if you fall out with the Lopez family. In that case, he might stand a chance again. And you assume that's why he's not finding a girlfriend now, right?"

Dorothy nodded, "Yeah."

"Don't sweat it. Kenneth's clear on where he stands! He knows you'll never fall for him." Karen had lost count of how many times she had this conversation with Kenneth.

Kenneth was well aware, too, that even if Dorothy and Everett were a no-go, he wouldn't be the one by her side.

"Then why does he still..."

"He's just stubborn! Isn't Everett the same?"

Dorothy bit her lips.

"Honestly, after the spat I had with Jeffrey today, I suddenly realized his life is what you'd call 'real living'! Look at you and Kenneth, and even look at Everett, you are all caught up in this love-hate relationship. But Jeffrey's different. His love life? Easy come, easy go. Sure it's short-lived, but he hops from one fling to another! Never a dull moment."

Karen was pretty open-minded, not the type to cling to the 'one and only' ideal. If things didn't work out, she'd move on without much fuss. She wasn't one to shy away from pillow talk with an ex, but she hadn't reached Jeffrey's level of indulgence.

Yet, as she pondered, she realized there was a certain allure to living for the moment and settling the problems when tomorrow comes. Was being tied down in a relationship really all that important? Karen recalled a saying she'd read somewhere: True lovers never part. If there's mutual interest and affection, there's no need to label it just to keep it going.

Dorothy glanced at Karen and gave a wry smile, "Don't let him corrupt you. He's a trust fund playboy; even if he parties all day, he's got the family fortune to burn through."

Considering Jeffrey's lifelong friendship with Everett, it was clear his family was well-off too.

"I'm just thinking out loud! It's a new life perspective, that's all."

No sooner had Karen finished speaking than she caught sight of a figure

approaching them..

Upon closer inspection, it was Jeffrey, the persistent playboy.

Dorothy sighed, "If you can't stand him, I'll send him packing for you."

"Not that much of a nuisance, really. You and Mr. Lopez are overthinking it!

Why would I waste time hating someone who'll be a

non-factor in my future? He's the high-flying heir to a fortune! I'm not even on his radar."

Dorothy shrugged.

Jeffrey approached, glanced at Karen, and then gave Dorothy a somewhat sheepish look, "Uh... Everett asked me to drive

Karen back to the hotel. Said it wasn't safe for her to go alone."

Dorothy's brow furrowed instinctively since she sensed something was off, but Karen was already on her feet, "Let's go, then.

Dorothy, I won't keep you from rest. Bye, sweet dreams!"

They left one after the other, their silhouettes retreating into the distance."

Together, they almost looked like a matching pair.

Chapter 519

Dorothy slipped back into the hospital room, finding Everett engrossed in a video call with the company's shareholders.

She didn't interrupt. Instead, she gave him a little wave, signaling that he should keep at it and not mind her.

Listening to Everett converse in smooth, fluent Spanish, Dorothy found a quiet corner to sit and watch him work.

Her mind wandered back to Everett as a middle school student, who always clad in his crisp, clean uniform, sitting silently while working on problems with his refined, scholarly look. He'd furrow his brow in concentration and occasionally flipped through textbooks and jotted down notes.

Back then, her impression of her deskmate was simple: he liked his space clean, wasn't much for chit-chat, and had a string of admirers. His family was loaded, too. Every day after school, a sleek black sedan would be waiting to whisk him away.

The make and model of the car were beyond her knowledge then, not to mention what a luxury car even was. All she knew was that it was the most impressive car she'd ever seen—the kind she figured she'd never get to ride in.

As she watched him now, Dorothy couldn't help but pull out her phone and snap a picture of Everett in deep thought.

She scrutinized the photo from every angle, marveling at how there seemed to be no dead angle to his face. His features were

sharply defined, his jawline chiseled, and his oceanic eyes were as deep as a serene pool. When his gaze dropped, the delicate fold of his eyelids became visible, and below that, his lashes fanned out like the feathers on a quill.

Dorothy saved the photo to her cloud album, hesitated for a few seconds before deciding whether to file it under 'Life' or 'Scenery.

Chewing on her lower lip, her fingers finally moved to create a new album in the cloud, renaming the untitled folder to "0825."

After these little adjustments, she felt a little silly, as if Everett's youthful spirit was contagious—she was even resorting to a bit of sneaky photography.

But her mood? It was pretty great.

"This album should be filled with our photos together and with the kids, not just me alone."

She had no idea when Everett had silently moved from the bed. He was now standing behind her.

Startled, Dorothy put on a stern face intentionally, "What are you doing up again? Dr. Quincy said you need to stay in bed!"

"I know my own body," he replied, reaching past Dorothy to swipe her phone, extracting his solo picture from the "0825" album and creating a new one named "Family," where he dropped the photo.

"What are you doing?"

"In '0825', I want to see lots of pictures with you, and with the kids."

He didn't want to be alone in that album.

Dorothy blinked. Then, she couldn't resist her laughter, "If you wanted a photo with me, you could've just asked! Beating around the bush isn't your style, Mr. Lopez."

Everett raised an eyebrow, "Fine, I want a photo with you. Is that alright, Ms. Sanchez?"

"Ummm... let me think about it," she teased, then relented, "Alright, I'll indulge your wish!"

She stood on tiptoes, phone in hand, switching to the front-facing camera. But try as she might, even on her tiptoes, she couldn't fit Everett's entire face in the frame.

"You're too tall, bend down a bit!"

Everett, with a half-smile, simply took the phone from her and effortlessly pulled Dorothy into his embrace.

Before she could react, he pressed the shutter button and planted a kiss on her lips right as the phone clicked.

All she heard was the click of her cell phone before she was pressed against the wall and felt his breath growing heavier.

“E...Everett... I thought we were just taking a photo?”

“Who made that deal with you?”

He hadn't said a word about just taking a photo.

Chapter 520

Dorothy felt Everett's wandering hands growing bolder by the second.

She tried to protest, but in a swift move, Everett shoved her phone into her hands. Great, now her hands were virtually occupied.

She attempted to push him away with her elbows, but she was wary of hitting his bruise. But where could she put the phone?

She couldn't just toss it aside!

“Everett! Since when did you become such a sly fox...” she exclaimed.

“Just trying to show you that struggling is pointless,” he replied with a mischievous grin.

“Hmph! Let's see if you can keep me at bay without the phone!”

With a chuckle, Everett snatched the phone away and skillfully tossed it onto the bed.

Dorothy saw her chance to escape, but in the blink of an eye, Everett had captured her wrists in one hand and held them aloft.

Now she was utterly at his mercy, even more than before.

“You're playing dirty!” she accused.

“Then call the cops,” Everett said. He became aroused while enjoying the sight of her flustered state. Truth be told, the moment she tried to sneak pictures of him, he had been devising all sorts of poses in his mind.

Feeling his heat close in, Dorothy struggled harder, “You've gone too far!”

“Not far enough! We won't have this freedom once Abigail and Langston arrive.”

With time running out, he was determined to make the most of their solitude.

“Everett, I really can't handle this...” Dorothy was close to developing a phobia.

Just the thought made her weak at the knees.

“Just once.”

“You're full of it...”

“I'll make it quick.”

Dorothy, fuming, tried to stamp on his foot.

The man did this on purpose; as soon as they were alone, his mind would fill with all sorts of naughty ideas.

"I can't do this! My back aches!"

"Oh, then let's try spooning."

Dorothy was totally shocked.

On the car ride back to the hotel, Karen sat in silence in the back seat. Jeffrey tousled his hair a few times and was still unable to come up with an icebreaker.

They were almost at the hotel when Karen suddenly spoke, "I need to stop by the grocery store."

"Sure," Jeffrey replied instantly, then hit the gas and headed towards the nearest supermarket.

Pulling up at the store entrance, Karen got out, and Jeffrey, following suit, was halted by her frown, "Stay in the car, don't follow me!"

Jeffery was frozen. Watching Karen hustle into the grocery store, he scoffed, ran his tongue over his cheek, and fished out a pack of cigarettes, intending to light it up.

He had the lighter ready when he decided to put the cigarette away. Unsure if Karen liked the smell of smoke, he opted not to risk it to avoid her ire for stinking up the car.

Karen soon emerged from the store. Her hands were empty, no snacks or water bottle in sight.

"Didn't find what you were looking for?"

"I got it," she said, her face flushing as she got into the car, purposefully turning her head away from him.

Jeffrey thought of teasing her, but the words died on his lips.

Today, he wasn't going to pick a fight with her.

Back at the hotel, Karen lagged behind, a stark change from her usual brisk pace. Jeffrey's room came first, and as he stopped, so did she.

"Something on your mind?" he asked.

"Um..."

Jeffrey turned to face her, "Well, spit it out. Today, I suppose I can deign to be your servant one more time-"

"Do you want?"

His sentence was cut short by Karen's interruption.

"What?"

"I mean... do you want?" she repeated.

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 521 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 521

Chapter 521

Jeffrey blinked in disbelief, realizing he had just uttered the words he wished he could take back, "Want what? Do you need another run to the grocery store?"

Karen shot him an annoyed glance, clearly on the brink of walking out.

Luckily, Jeff's reflexes kicked in as he grabbed her wrist, "Hold on, can you clarify? How can I play along if I don't know what you're on about? What's got your feathers all ruffled now?"

"Let go of me! I don't need this—I'm going to bed!"

The word 'bed' struck Jeffrey like lightning, and he suddenly grasped what her question meant.

What kind of nonsensical reply had he blurted out?

"Karen, you—"

"Let. Go!" Karen was past the point of wanting to converse with him. She wished he'd just vanish!

"Wait, just hold on! Damn it, I just got it!"

With a firm tug, Jeffrey reeled Karen back into his arms, trapping her between his chest and the wall.

His masculine scent mingled with his breath, tinged with a hint of tobacco, enveloping them both.

Their bodies were tangled and inextricable.

They locked eyes, staring at each other for an eternity.

He licked his lower lip, his voice tight with urgency, "Alright. Let's do it."

Karen grimaced, "But now I don't want to."

"Are you playing games with me?"

"Nope, I was up for it a minute ago, now I'm not. How's that playing games?"

Jeffrey always lost these verbal spats. He moved his lips, struggling to find the words to argue back, but nothing came out.

"I don't care, you asked me and now I'm ready!"

"Jeffrey, you—mmph!" Her words were swallowed by his sudden kiss.

In his haste, Jeffrey knocked into Karen's teeth, a pang of pain making her nose twitch. But before she could curse, her lips were already claimed.

He kissed her, fumbling with the bedroom door, then lifted her off her feet and tossed her onto the bed.

“Stop it, just stop!”

Karen suddenly felt a flicker of fear. Why did she have to provoke a man who held it for such a long time? She just wanted a taste of the rich hottie instead of meeting her end in bed!

“This was your idea, now deal with it!”

As Karen attempted to wriggle deeper into the bed, Jeffrey grabbed her ankles and pulled her beneath him.

“I changed my mind, stop! Just solve it yourself. I promise I won’t interrupt you.”

Jeffrey glared, his large hands pinning her head as she clawed and pinched at his back, but he refused to break the kiss.

“Mmmph...”

Karen was exhausted from struggling. This man was immovable like a mountain!

Suddenly, Jeffrey stopped.

Karen was stunned, “What, what’s wrong?”

“I forgot to buy something. Hold on, I need to step out!”

The last thing he needed was to risk an unexpected pregnancy.

Jeffrey, fighting the discomfort, reached for his keys to leave, but Karen quickly grabbed him.

“I have it in my purse”

“What?”

“I bought them at the grocery store just now.”

Jeffrey narrowed his eyes, “Feels like I’ve walked into a trap, doesn’t it?”

Karen couldn’t help but laugh at his comment, “If you think it’s a trap, then don’t touch me.”

Trap or not, even if it’s a black hole, I can’t resist tonight!”

Sure enough, Jeffrey found a small box in her purse, labeled: Ultra Thin, 3–Pack.

He frowned, “You only got one box?”

“Yeah...”

“Well, you better hope it’s enough.”

Chapter 522

To be honest, Karen hadn’t exactly had a slew of ex–boyfriends. In fact, most of her so–called “experience” had been garnered from steamy scenes on her laptop, rather than the real deal.

But tonight, she thought she might literally die of exhaustion in bed.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of tossing and turning, she grabbed her phone with her sweaty hands. It was already 3

A.M. If she didn't get some shut-eye soon, tomorrow might as well be canceled.

She threw a glance at Jeffrey, who stood by the full-length window and puffed on a cigarette with nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist. It seemed that the word 'tired' wasn't in his vocabulary. Feeling her gaze, he turned back. He raised one side of his eyebrows before extinguishing his cigarette and sauntering over to her.

"Still got some energy left?" he teased.

"Get lost," Karen grumbled, attempting to swing her legs out of the bed for a much-needed shower before retreating to her own room for sleep.

She wanted to sleep just like that but the last thing she wanted was for Jeffrey to think she was clinging to him and hoping to spend the whole night with him.

Jeffrey, however, followed her with a widening grin, "Need company in the shower?"

"I can manage. Thanks," she snapped back, locking him out of the bathroom.

"Huh. You do have a lot of energy left," He chuckled, scratching his nose in amusement.

He wandered back to his phone, inexplicably drawn to capture the disheveled state of his bed with a camera shot he briefly considered sharing on Twitter. But then he thought better of as he recalled the trove of other conquests in his phone.

When Karen emerged in a bathrobe, she found Jeffrey propped up against the bed frame, idly scrolling through his contacts. The phone's glow played across his face, defining his sharp features with a roguish charm.

She wasn't in the mood to admire his looks, though; good-looking or not, he wasn't hers.

"I'm taking your bathrobe and I'll bring you another from my room tomorrow," she announced, breaking his concentration.

"You're leaving?"

"What else?"

"Just stay here. The bed's the same as in your room." His brows furrowed slightly as he said.

"It's not the same," Karen said coolly, her face losing the flush of passion from moments before.

"What's different?" he pressed.

"My room doesn't have you in it."

Silence hung between them.

Karen was too tired and sleepy to argue. She bent down to grab her clothes, intending to leave.

Jeffrey caught her arm in a burst of impatience, "What's the problem now? Didn't I take good care of you?"

"No complaints," she admitted truthfully; he had indeed 'taken care' of her, almost to the point of meeting God.

"So why the rush to leave?"

Jeffrey had apparently forgotten his past post-encounter routine of shooing girls away. His handsome face was a picture of bewilderment now.

Karen, searching for an excuse, said, "I'm just not used to sleeping with someone else."

"And after sleeping with your exes, you'd leave them too?"

"What's it to you?" Her exes were entirely different from Jeffrey.

Worn out after the night's activities, Jeffrey didn't want to argue. He ran a hand through his damp hair, "Fine, go back to your room. Call me when you wake up."

Karen didn't respond. She pushed the door open and was about to leave but was stopped by Jeffrey again.

"Wait! I just realized... I don't have your number, and you don't have mine."

"That's right, Karen agreed as if it were the most natural thing in the world. So she'd already dismissed his earlier request as idle talk.

Jeffrey grabbed his phone and handed it to her. "Enter your number. I'll save it."

Chapter 523

Karen glanced at his phone, her expression clearly stating she had no intention of taking it.

"No need."

No need?!

Jeffrey's face darkened and even got a little grim, "Not even going to give me your number?"

Looking up, Karen's eyes were filled with disbelief, as if the request was the most absurd thing she'd ever heard, "Why would I give you my number?"

"We just... you know," Jeffrey stammered, struggling to find the right words in his cracked brain during the early hours of the morning. "Don't you want to keep some sort of... memento?"

Karen laughed, "With all the souvenirs you've got, you won't miss one from

me. Once you're back in home, just hook up a few more times and consider it on my behalf."

She wasn't about to get caught up in Jeffrey's long list of conquests or leave her mark there.

Her instinct told her to distance herself.

Yet Jeffrey, visibly panicked, grabbed her arm and pulled her back into the room.

"Karen, are you playing me? After all the effort I put in, you think I'm some gigolo?"

"As if you didn't enjoy it!" Karen retorted, pointing to the evidence in the trash can, "You went through all of that!"

Silence fell between them.

"Are you finished? I really need to sleep now!" she said; her exhaustion made her vision blur.

But Jeffrey stood there, immovable, with anger brewed in his eyes.

"Why did you suddenly decide to hook up with me?"

Karen paused, "I wanted to, so I asked. No big reason. It's not like I forced you. You agreed, didn't you?"

Grinding his teeth, Jeffrey felt a mix of embarrassment and humiliation.

He had a thousand things he wanted to say, but all that came out was a scornful tone, "Are you always this casual?!"

Karen's fist clenched involuntarily, but she quickly relaxed.

"Think what you want," she said, her tone dismissive. "I just thought you were hot. Sure, there's not much to you beyond that, but your looks... they're appealing. I wanted a taste, that's all."

It was the blunt truth.

None of her previous boyfriends, whether she slept with them or not, were as handsome as Jeffrey. That was a fact.

She treated it as a bit of fun in a foreign land, and nothing more. It wasn't her first time, and she saw no reason to make a big deal out of it. She wouldn't even mention it to a future partner. That's how inconsequential it was to her.

"Just wanted to try something new?" Jeffrey repeated her words, his frustration growing with each syllable.

"Yes." Karen nodded earnestly, "You're like the fancy fruit on the top shelf of the grocery store. Everyone wants a taste, but no one wants to buy the whole batch."

Affording it was one thing, but even if you could, it didn't mean you'd want it all the time.

Premium fruit doesn't always mean it's the best—sometimes it's just about the

appealing exterior.

“Great, just great!” Jeffrey sarcastically wanted to applaud her analogy, “I’m a piece of fruit?”

“Premium fruit!” Karen emphasized.

“To hell with premium fruit!”

Jeffrey’s shout startled Karen, jolting her awake from her drowsiness.

“What’s your problem? Are you sick or something?”

“I thought you wanted-” he began.

“Wanted what?” she asked.

“To... To keep this kind of relationship going!” He was adamant not to say the words ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’ first. He wouldn’t lose this battle.

“Oh.” Karen’s response was light and nonchalant, “That explains the phone number. Then you misunderstood. I’m not interested in that. Can I go now? I’m really tired!”

Chapter 524

“I’m at my wits’ end with you!”

Jeffrey paced the room with his upper body naked and hands on hips.

Karen looked for any chance to escape, but she was yanked back each time she tried to do so.

“Bro, it’s half past three. Am I not getting any sleep?”

“Like I can sleep with all this going on?” he was so fumed that the idea of rest was far from his mind.

He had planned to finish his cigarette, curl up with her in bed, and after a good night’s rest, lay everything out on the table for a heart-to-heart in the morning. But she had to spring a nasty surprise on him in the dead of night!

“If you’re going to be up all night, don’t drag me into it,” Karen said, rubbing her eyes and yawning. “I’m not kidding, I’m seriously tired!”

Seeing her trying to leave again, Jeffrey grabbed the clothes from her hands and, without warning, tossed them into the bathtub and turned the tap on!

Karen was dumbfounded, “What the hell’s wrong with you? I need to wear those!”

“We’re both beat, and I’m not having this talk now. Hit the hay, and we’ll sort it out once we’re up,” Jeffrey said, feeling a heartache from all the frustration.

But his mind was so blocked with things he wanted to say and do, he couldn’t

get it out. Sleep came first.

“I won’t stay. I need to go back.” Even without her soaked clothes, she still had her robe and more clothes in her luggage back in her room.

Grinding his teeth, Jeffrey snapped, “Say one more word, and neither of us is sleeping. I’ll keep you up until you can’t even get out of bed!”

“You wouldn’t dare! If I don’t consent, it’s illegal!”

“Try me and see if I dare!” As he stepped closer, his tall frame cast a shadow over her, which was an imposing presence she couldn’t ignore.

Karen thought she’d better be supple, “How about this, Jeffrey? I’ll go back and sleep, and I’ll come find you once I’m awake.

You wait for me here, okay?”

“No way!”

“What if I insist on going back?”

He narrowed his eyes at her, then swiftly yanked off her robe, along with his own and the towels, and tossed them all into the water-filled tub.

“You’re out of your mind...” Karen was thoroughly convinced that Jeffrey had lost his marbles.

No decent person could come up with such a scheme!

“Go ahead, leave naked. I won’t stop you.”

Karen was seething as her eyes caught sight of the comforter on the bed. She reached to pull it over her body so she could wrap herself in it and leave.

As long as the hotel’s corridor cameras didn’t catch her bare, it would be fine.

Jeffrey’s icy voice warned from behind, “So you’re choosing not to need a comforter tonight, huh?”

“Go to a damn mental hospital! Did Heather screw up your head or something?” Karen’s temper flared as well. “Aren’t you supposed to be some kind of a playboy? Can’t handle the game? Do you cling to all your past flings like this?”

Silence.

No. Never, except for her.

“Listen, I don’t want to wake up Dorothy in the middle of the night. Don’t push it too far, or it’ll be bad for both of us.”

Having said her piece, Karen scanned the room for anything she could wear. Her gaze settled on Jeffrey’s blue hoodie.

She strode over, pulled it on, and thankfully, Jeffrey's height meant the hoodie was long enough to cover what needed covering. Without hesitation, she stormed out, slamming the door so hard the frame rattled.

Chapter 525

Dorothy's eyes fluttered open to the ghostly glow of her phone, where an unread message from Karen blinked back. It was nearly 4 AM when Karen had sent it.

[Hey Dorothy, please thank Mr. Lopez for me, but I'm skipping the tour of Swevia Country! Planning to grab a flight home as soon.. as I wake up. Kenneth's got stuff going on and my folks are nagging me to come back. They miss me! No need for you to drop by, just take good care of Mr. Lopez, okay? Remember, whatever you decide, your girls are behind you all the way! Love ya, xoxo!] Karen's sudden change of heart puzzled Dorothy, but considering Karen's whimsical nature, it wasn't entirely out of character. [Worried about my troubles and couldn't sleep? Hit me back when you're up, Karen. You came all this way to Swevia Country for me. If you leave without a proper send-off, it'll eat me up inside for life.]

Dorothy sent her reply, but the silence that followed suggested Karen had already succumbed to sleep, probably not to stir until noon.

Behind her, Everett stirred. His large hand slipped around her waist, pulling her back into his embrace with a sudden tug.

"Ouch..."

But his big move tugged at his wound.

Dorothy quickly set her phone aside and nudged him gently, "Are you trying to get yourself killed? Let me check if it's bleeding. I should call Dr. Quincy to have a look."

"Now?"

"And when should I call her? Dr. Quincy is probably at work by now."

Everett raised an eyebrow, "You sure?"

Dorothy paused as she was suddenly conscious of the state of the room.

Their clothes littered the carpet, and the remnants of

last night's passion lingered in the air, unventilated in their rush to sleep.

If Quincy walked in now, she'd know exactly what had transpired.

She found herself at a loss for words, "I'll... check your wound first, then."

"Fine by me." Everett presented himself with no reservation.

Dorothy's fingers danced over his skin, causing a tickle here and a slight wince there when they grazed the wound.

Suddenly, he grabbed her wandering wrist.

"That's enough. Stop looking."

Confused by his tone, she insisted, "Did I hurt you? Just bear with me, I need to see if the stitches held up!"

Everett's handsome face tightened, and his jawline was more pronounced with tension.

"I said stop," he reiterated firmly.

"Just a little longer, okay?"

Instead of relenting, Everett directed her hand downward.

Dorothy recoiled the moment her fingertips encountered an unexpected heat, very different from her own. Shocked, she

withdrew her hand immediately.

"You..."

"Which is why I told you to stop. Go get ready for the day."

He knew he had to exercise restraint for Dorothy's sake. She was literally falling apart.

Flustered, Dorothy gathered her bathrobe tightly around her and scurried into the bathroom.

"Taking a shower?" Everett called after her.

"Yes!"

"How long?"

Pausing, she called back, "About twenty minutes?"

He glanced at the clock. "Fine."

Twenty minutes was more than enough time.

Fresh from her shower, Dorothy found Everett dabbing at his hands with a paper towel.

"What spilled?" she inquired.

"Nothing." A rare flush colored Everett's cheeks as he avoided her gaze.

Dorothy reached up to touch his forehead, "You don't have a fever. Why are you so flushed?"

With a resigned grip on her hand, Everett's voice carried a hint of restraint,

"You might want to avoid touching me right now."

Dorothy blinked.

"Dorothy, can you check with Dr. Quincy when I'm allowed to shower?"

Chapter 526

Dorothy nodded with a hint of resolve, "Alright, I'll be back in a jiffy."

She slipped into something more comfortable and headed out, making her

way to Quincy's office. She found the door ajar, yet the room was devoid of life.

"She's probably using the bathroom or got caught up in some urgent matter before coming back," she figured.

Dorothy didn't leave. She stood by the door, waiting, when her phone began to buzz.

She expected it was Karen, but instead, it was an unfamiliar number.

A call from back home.

Worried it might be the kids in some kind of trouble, she answered promptly.

The voice on the other end was tinged with impatience and a youthful edge, sounding like a high school student, "Hey, how old is this surveillance footage on your flash drive?"

It was Byte 7.

"Quite old," Dorothy whispered, glancing around to make sure no one was listening, "Are you having trouble with the restoration?"

The last thing she wanted was for Byte 7 to hit a dead end.

"Of course, it's a royal pain. You didn't think to mention that earlier?" Byte 7's tone carried the eternal irritability of someone who's perpetually sleep-deprived, "You round up the rest of my fee yet?"

His sudden pivot to money caught Dorothy off-guard, "I'm working on it! Can you recover the data sooner?"

"Nope! It's a real headache!"

Then what's the point of this call? She was confused.

"Stop trying to scrape together the cash. Just be my girl for a week, and we're even."

He wouldn't lay his fingers on any girls, so being chosen by him was a privilege.

Byte 7 could sense she was hell-bent on gathering the funds, and his pride was taking a hit. He thought any girl in her right mind would jump at such an offer, even pretend to be short on cash if they weren't!

But this girl was actually trying.

"I can get the money," Dorothy assured him earnestly.

She had done the math; selling all her stocks, bonds, and maybe a piece of real estate would get her close enough. And for the shortfall, a bank loan or a few credit cards would cover the rest.

"Suit yourself," Byte 7 grumbled and hung up.

Dorothy stared at her phone, conjuring up an image of Byte 7 on the other end: brows furrowed, exuding an air of indifference to

the world.

A pale, prideful, brash teen – that was all she knew of Byte 7.

“Ms. Sanchez?”

Quincy’s voice pulled Dorothy from her thoughts. She saw Dorothy standing there when she came back.

Dorothy looked up and smiled, “Dr. Quincy, you’re back.”

“Yeah, come in,” Quincy gestured while she put her hands in the pockets of her lab coat. The high ponytail she tied gave her a youthful, innocent look, “What’s up?”

“Everett sent me to ask when he can take a shower.”

“Oh, him... He can’t shower just yet. Keep wiping him down for now,” Quincy paused, then glanced at her, “I forgot that Mr.

Lopez is a bit of a neat freak. He didn’t refuse your help, did he?”

“No, I’m allowed,” Dorothy was aware of Everett’s peculiarities, but he hadn’t resisted her assistance, “He just wants to shower on his own, feels better that way.”

Quincy smirked, recalling Everett’s expression when she wanted to give him a helping hand. He acted as if touching any other woman would be the end of him.

“So Mr. Lopez’s neat freak is selective!”

Noticing Quincy’s slightly furrowed brow, Dorothy quickly added, “Did he do something to upset you? Don’t hold it against him, I swear his neat freak is quite severe!”

Dorothy knew Everett all too well; she anticipated that upon regaining consciousness, he would indeed coldly decline any other woman’s touch.

Chapter 527

“No, no, you’ve got it all wrong!” Quincy waved his hands dismissively, “It’s just that I’ve never seen anyone with such a severe case of neat freak. I tried to give him a hand the day outside the hospital room, but he’d rather hobble along in pain than accept help.”

Dorothy knew that was something Everett was capable of.

“He’s stubborn as a mule.”

Quincy chuckled, “I guess you’re the only one who dares to speak so candidly about the president of Lopez Corporation.”

Dorothy tugged at the corner of her mouth, remaining silent, not feeling any sense of privilege. An ugly ducky like her had nothing to brag about in front of the real swan.

Returning to the hospital room, Dorothy checked her phone again – still no reply from Karen.

Looks like she had another all-nighter!

Dorothy felt a wave of guilt, fearing Karen was staying up out of concern for her. It seemed like she was dragging others into her mess again.

“What did the doctor say?”

Everett had seized the opportunity of Dorothy’s absence to open his laptop and tackle some work.

Otherwise, she’d nag him about resting instead.

“You can skip the shower; I’ll give you another sponge bath in a bit.”

Everett looked at her and pursed his lips in silence.

“What? Not keen on the idea?” Dorothy stopped in her tracks, arching an eyebrow, “Or should I find some other bombshell to come over?”

Everett’s handsome face turned stern. The seriousness of him reminded people of an old fogey.

“I don’t like that kind of joke.”

“I was just kidding. I know you can’t handle it.” Dorothy turned to wet a washcloth for him, and upon her return, she sensed Everett really didn’t want her fussing over him. “What’s the matter now?”
“Uncomfortable.”

At that word, Dorothy reacted like a startled deer, “Where does it hurt?”

Everett looked at her helplessly, “Having you bathe me is like torture.”

He figured the best way was to wait until he was “well-fed” – that might lessen the pain when she helped him. But by that time,

Dorothy would be so drained she could barely lift her arms.

It took Dorothy only a moment to grasp his meaning.

He’d been driving himself to the brink of madness these days as if he was trying to make up for four lost years in one fell swoop!

So much so that even fresh from sleep, she was worn to a frazzle!

“So, what do we do? Get a male nurse?”

“No.” That’d be even weirder!

Dorothy could see a rare hint of conflict on Everett’s chiseled features. She couldn’t help but smile, “Or maybe we could ask

Jeffrey to help out? He’s your buddy so that shouldn’t be too awkward, right?”

“Forget it.”

“Why?”

Everett flashed a grin, “He’d be jealous that I’m tougher than him.”

Silently, Dorothy glared at him.

It seemed that men all had unshakeable confidence in this particular area! “By the way, you don’t need to worry about finding Karen a tour guide for Swevia Country. She said she’s planning to leave after she wakes up today.”

“Why the sudden change of heart?”

“I don’t know.” Dorothy shook her head, “Maybe Kenneth’s pressing her.” Everett’s handsome face froze, darkening at the mention of the name Kenneth.

“Since when did you start calling him that?” He remembered that Dorothy used to call Kenneth ‘Mr. Nelson’ with utmost respect!

“I can’t remember.” She honestly couldn’t!

But Everett, as if seeking torment, pressed on, “Was it during those four years?”

“Seems like it. He helped me a lot.”

Chapter 528

“So, about him...”

“Why do you have to pry so much? Don’t you already know what’s between us?” Dorothy wished to close the book on this topic, because if it wasn’t making anyone happy, why dwell on it? She felt like Kenneth’s kindness towards her was something that could never be erased, and she didn’t want to lie to Everett about that.

“Alright, I won’t ask.” Everett kept his gaze fixed on her. “When do you think is the best time to pick up Abigail and Langston? You decide.”

He had initially thought about having Kevin drop them off, but after giving it some thought, he figured he should consult Dorothy.

It would be disrespectful to make such a decision without her input.

“Let’s wait a few more days, okay?”

Of course, Dorothy longed to see her children and would have loved to have them with her immediately!

But there was a part of her that was apprehensive and fearful about how to break the news to Kenneth, especially since

Langston had been with him for so long—longer than she had been with the child herself. The thought of suddenly having them

whisked away to the Lopez family, with no idea when they might see Kenneth again, made the words stick in her throat, whether face to face or over the phone.

So, she figured the kids could spend a little more time with Kenneth—just a bit longer.

“I’ll follow your lead,” Everett didn’t say much, although he had read the reason for her hesitation from her eyes.

The same sentiment remained unspoken between them: he didn’t want to pressure Dorothy. He wanted to give her the space to live her life the way she preferred, to choose her own path. As for his feelings....

What pain, loss, or sadness could possibly outweigh the agony of the four years without her? He had endured that; what was there to fear now?

Their mutual silence hung heavy in the air until the whirlwind that was Jeffrey burst in, shattering the quiet.

“Everett! When is Karen flying back home? I need to know!”

He blurted out his question before noticing Dorothy was there too.

She frowned instinctively and had her guard up, “Why do you need to know?” Jeffrey, caught off-guard, stumbled over his words.

“Jeffrey, Karen is my friend, and she’s worlds apart from you. I’d really prefer it if you didn’t make her your next conquest,”

Dorothy said as her protective instincts kicked in. She had wanted to voice her concerns the day before but had held back because Karen was there.

“I... I didn’t say she’s my conquest...”

“Then enlighten me, why are you constantly looking for her?” Dorothy was naturally protective over her best friend. She feared that Karen would get entangled with a man like Jeffrey. What would become of her if the man just hit and ran?

Jeffrey’s thoughts scrambled; he opened his mouth but no defense came out.

Everett propped himself up and pulled Dorothy close, “You don’t have to be so hostile towards him. Jeffrey... is not a bad guy.”

Everett was confident about that much.

“I know the relationship between you two, which it’s like me and Karen. But until I can be sure you’re serious about her, Jeffrey,

I’m opposed to anything happening between you two.”

Dorothy laid it all out there. There was no need for pretenses in front of Jeffrey.

It always came down to some “simple truths” between men and women, didn’t it?

Jeffrey had only met Karen a few days ago, and Dorothy wasn’t buying any overnight romance.

“Hold on, both of you! Stop acting like I’m the one chasing after Karen, will

you? She was the one who offered to be in my bed last night!”

Chapter 529

“What!” Dorothy shot up from her seat, her eyes wide with disbelief. Everett’s heart sank, and without thinking, he glanced at Dorothy, knowing all too well what Karen meant to her. To mess with Karen was like poking a bear, and Jeffrey had just jabbed at Dorothy’s sore spot!

Jeffrey, still feeling hard done by from the night before, protested, “I swear, it was all Karen! I mean, I just went along with it and didn’t say no. If you don’t believe me, ask her!”

Dorothy didn’t want to hear his excuses; she reached for her phone, ready to call Karen to get the lowdown..

Everett stepped in, urging Dorothy to let Jeffrey finish his piece, and asked, “So, are you saying it was mutual?”

Jeffrey’s handsome face crumpled with frustration. “Of course! I’m not the type to force a woman, come on! After we left the hospital yesterday, she said she needed to hit the supermarket, so I gave her a lift. Next thing I know, back at the hotel, she’s asking if I’m up for it!”

Dorothy coughed pointedly, and Jeffrey hit the brakes on his story, sparing them the explicit details.

“And what are you planning to do? Why did you come here today asking about her flight?”

“She slept with me and didn’t even leave a number! What can I possibly do?”

Jeffrey looked at Dorothy as if she were the judge and jury. “You should be asking her what she wants, not me!”

Dorothy recalled Karen mentioning how Jeffrey was quite the looker. Could Karen really have taken a fancy to him?

“I haven’t reached out to Karen yet. She’s probably still asleep. I’ll get her side after we talk.”

“No way. Her room’s empty.”

“What?”

Dorothy quickly dialed Karen’s number, and this time, someone picked up. She should’ve called earlier; she had only held back to avoid waking Karen, never imagining she’d just take off!

“Dorothy!”

Karen sounded like she was at the airport, with announcements blaring in the background.

“Why’d you leave without saying goodbye? Didn’t you see my message?”

“I did, but you know I can’t stand goodbyes! I’d turn into a blubbering mess, so I snuck away! Besides, we’ll see each other when you’re back from your trip; it’s only a month!”

Dorothy glanced at Jeffrey and hesitated but decided against bringing him up. If Karen didn’t want to talk about it, she probably intended to address it later or not at all. It would be too awkward to pry.

“So, you’re at the airport now?”

“Yeah! Don’t worry, Kenneth’s picking me up, and he’s bringing the kids along too. I’ve missed them!”

“Alright, take care then.”

After hanging up, Jeffrey fixed his gaze on Dorothy, “Where is Karen?”

“She’s gone. If she didn’t bother to inform you before leaving, it indicates she has no intention of keeping in touch. You should let it go

Jeffrey’s anger flared. “Why does she get to take the lead, sleep with me, and then shirk responsibility? Does she think she can just define our relationship however she wants?”

Dorothy crossed her arms. “Well, what do you want then?”

“She’s at the airport, right? Fine, I’ll go get some answers!”

As Jeffrey stormed off, Dorothy called after him, “You don’t even know what you want out of this! How is Karen supposed to define it? Think it over before you go chasing after her!”

But he was already out the door, not looking back

Chapter 530

Dorothy swiveled around, her fingers itching to dial Karen’s number to inform her that Jeffrey had gone looking for her. However, Karen had gone radio silent, probably caught up in the chaos of baggage drop-off and security checks.

Everett watched her furrowed brow and spoke in a soothing voice, “Don’t worry. Didn’t Jeffrey say he doesn’t have Karen’s number? He probably will struggle to find her.”

“What’s with those two, how did they even end up together?”

Dorothy had her reservations about Jeffrey. Not because he had once insulted her; it was his reputation as a ladies’ man that concerned her. After all, Karen was all talk and no experience – how could she ever handle a player like Jeffrey?

After rambling on, Dorothy glanced down and found Everett’s gaze fixed on her, intense and unwavering.

She arched an eyebrow, thinking there was something on her face, “What?”

“Dorothy, you’re not mad at Jeffrey on my account, are you?”

“Relax, I’m not about to hold a grudge that would curse your whole family tree.”

“Good to know.”

Karen had already made it to airport, checked in her luggage, and after passing through security, found a cozy diner to grab a bite. She noticed the missed call from Dorothy and instinctively wanted to call back, but ultimately decided against it.

Unanswered calls didn’t stop her from tearing up over her meal, though! She thought to herself, Dorothy was just too sweet, calling repeatedly out of concern for her!

Karen had always hated goodbyes; they made her want to cry ever since she was little. Even the mere sight of such farewells would set her off!

Her tears fell in big drops, but that didn’t stop her from making the steak on her plate disappear, piece by piece.

Nearly done with her meal, she wiped away her tears and headed to the lounge to wait for her flight.

The return ticket was still first–class, courtesy of Kenneth, who wanted to ensure her comfort. The lounge was plush, and she found a sofa to lie down on and catch up on some sleep.

In a drowsy haze, she felt someone nudge her arm.

Karen jolted awake to see a foreign beauty smiling down at her!

The language barrier was real; she couldn’t understand a word, but the flight attendant pointing to her ticket was an unmistakable cue.

“Thank you!” Karen responded, realizing it was time to board.

She grabbed her carry–on, sent a quick message to Kenneth with her arrival time, prepared to switch off her phone, and got ready to board the plane for more sleep.

Once she got on the plane and found her seat, she quickly settled in.

Karen sighed, thinking, you had to hand it to age; pulling an all–nighter just wasn’t as easy to bounce back from anymore.

She slipped into the provided slippers, pulled out a blanket, and before lying down, she turned on the ‘Do Not Disturb’ light.

With more than ten hours of flight time, she was looking forward to some quality rest.

Just as Karen was about to drift off into dreamland, a voice calling her name echoed through the cabin.

“Karen!”

She listened carefully, it was unmistakable.
Frowning, she sat up mid yawn only to see Jeffrey standing there!
What the hell?
Karen blinked a few times, rubbing her eyes for clarity.
No mistake, this wasn't a dream.

"Weren't you supposed to find me in my room after you woke up? Huh? Karen!" Jeffrey's voice was filled with frustration, contrasting sharply with Karen's befuddled state. He had no reason to be here.
"Are you also...heading back home?" she asked.
"I'm here to get you!" Jeffrey marched over and grabbed her sleeve, "Think you can run away? Think again!"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 531 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 531

Chapter 531

Karen glanced around the first-class cabin, relieved that no one else seemed to be paying attention to their spat.

"Can you let go already? Why would I run? I haven't done anything wrong!"

"Haven't you?" Jeffrey's eyes widened in disbelief.

Matching his gaze with her own defiant stare, Karen shot back, "What have I done wrong, huh? Tell me!"

"You..." Jeffrey choked on his words, unable to voice his true grievance in such a public setting. But then a thought struck him, and he blurted out, "You took my hoodie, didn't you? You never gave it back to me. That hoodie cost me a pretty penny, 950 bucks."

Karen was stunned into silence. Did he really buy a first-class ticket just to chase after a hoodie? Was there some special significance to that piece of clothing?

"Now, give me back my hoodie!"

"It's not with me. I left it at the hotel front desk when I checked out," Karen frowned, puzzled. "Didn't they tell you when you checked out?"

Jeffrey was taken aback.

Of course, they didn't! Because he hadn't checked out. He had no plans to return home today!

The only reason he was on this flight was that he'd pulled some strings and

paid through the nose to catch this woman!

“Why are you just standing there? Go back to the hotel and get your hoodie before the plane takes off!” Karen urged him, almost as frantic as if the hoodie were hers.

Jeffrey felt a momentary illusion that he was indeed just there for the hoodie, spurred by her urgency.

“I’ve already bought my ticket. You can reimburse me for that.”

“Come on, Mr. Turner, are you really short on cash?”

“I am! You insisted on taking my hoodie, so you’re responsible.” Jeffrey clung to his excuse, not about to let it go.

Karen rolled her eyes, silently cursing him for being so petty. She wanted to give him a piece of her mind but figured it wasn’t worth it—they wouldn’t be crossing paths again anyway.

“How much was it?”

“Two grand.” Jeffrey whipped out his phone.

“Are you kidding me?” Karen nearly spat in disgust. “No way! I’ll give you one hundred, take it or leave it.”

Jeffrey casually took a seat next to her, his imposing presence making her instinctively scoot back.

“One hundred works. Add me on WhatsApp and I’ll send you my bank details.”

“Why not just say your bank details? I can do a bank transfer right now.”

Karen schooled him as if he were a clueless aristocrat.

Once she got rid of Jeffrey, she could get back to her much-needed rest.

“I don’t do it that way. I only accept money after you add me as a friend.”

“No way.” Karen pocketed her phone decisively. “I have no intention of adding you on any contact list, be it my phone number, WhatsApp, or anything else.”

She was firm, leaving no room for negotiation.

“Why not?” Jeffrey couldn’t grasp this one simple fact. “I haven’t done anything to you. You were the one who came onto me yesterday!”

Karen didn’t want to hear it.

“But wasn’t it a mutual thing yesterday?”

“Yes!”

“So, after it’s done, we go our separate ways. Isn’t that an unspoken rule we both know?”

Jeffrey narrowed his eyes, taking a deep breath. “So, you treated me like a high-class fling, huh?”

Karen nodded without hesitation, “Exactly.”

“You’re so wrong!” Jeffrey’s voice rose. “So, you booked yourself a first–class seat on the return flight to scout for your next high–class fling, is that it?!”

Chapter 532

“Jeffrey, seriously? Are you being a sore loser right now?”

The way he was yelling at her, you’d think he’d caught his girlfriend cheating. But all they had was a no–strings–attached fling, and now he’s acting as if he’s got dibs on her?

–

Karen hadn’t expected this from Jeffrey Mr. Heartbreaker himself.

She thought he would appreciate her slipping away quietly this morning, no fuss, no muss.

“Who’s a sore loser?” Jeffrey always had a short fuse with Karen’s remarks.

“Take a wild guess?”

His clenched fists tightened, and oh, how he wished he could just shut her up–the sass from those lips only served to infuriate him further!

“Fine, so you say that I am a sore loser, right?” In one swift move, he wrapped his arms around Karen, pulling her tight against his chest. “Then I admit it! I am a sore loser!”

“Get off me... what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Karen, you owe me.”

Karen’s expression could’ve been mistaken for someone hearing a ghost story. She struggled to break free, and just as she did, her hair got tangled with a button on his shirt!

Fuming, she was ready to just rip her hair out when suddenly Jeffrey’s hand caught hers. He was smiling, his chest vibrating with suppressed chuckles.

“Why are you always so fiery? Just untangle it, will you?”

“Back off! Let me go, the plane’s about to take off!”

She had been looking forward to a solid ten hours of beautiful sleep!

“I’m coming home with you,” he declared, having bought the ticket with no intention of disembarking unless she did too.

“Like a bad penny, you always turn up!”

“That’s right, I do!”

“You’re sick. Return the ticket and save your money to see a doctor!”

While he untangled her hair, Jeffrey was laughing, completely unbothered by her insults. “Alright, we’ll go to the doctor together after we land.”

Karen was speechless, tugging at her hair to get away from him, only to feel a sharp pain at her scalp.

“Easy, I’m almost done!”

And with that, Jeffrey pulled her even closer.

All Karen could smell was the faint scent of his cologne, transporting her back to the night before, when he had her under him, demanding and taking without reserve.

Embarrassed by the flashbacks, she flushed, holding her breath, waiting for the moment her hair would be free so she could push this man away for good.

Just as she anticipated his movements slowing, signaling he was about to free her, Karen tried to move. Jeffrey, seizing the opportunity, gripped her wrist firmly and pinned her down on the reclined seat.

“What are you doing? We’re on a plane!”

“I think you know exactly what I want.”

“Jeffrey, can we not do this right now? I’m at a loss for words with you! If I had known you were this clingy, last night I would have...”

His gaze sharpened. “You would have what?”

Karen shrank back, “Just... sit down, okay? Stop making a scene! You wanted to talk, didn’t you? Let’s talk.”

The last thing she wanted was to be the center of attention in first class.

“Talk for real?”

“Yes, for real!”

Skeptically, Jeffrey pulled out his phone. “Add me on WhatsApp.”

“Can we talk first before adding?”

Maybe after talking, he wouldn’t want to add her anymore, so she wouldn’t need to waste time deleting him.

Chapter 533

“Why are you so against swapping digits with me?”

Jeffrey had noticed it alright. Karen wasn’t entirely unyielding, but whenever it came to sharing her WhatsApp or phone number, she’d turn as rigid as a board!

“You want the truth?” Karen raised an eyebrow.

“Hit me.”

“I just don’t want to be in touch with you, period. I’m scared of you contacting me. Ideally, we’d never see each other again. And if by some cruel twist of fate, we do bump into each other, let’s just pretend we’re strangers, okay?”

Karen's honesty was brutal, but it was exactly what was on her mind! From the very start, she hadn't entertained a single thought of having any sort of future with Jeffrey.

It wasn't just because he was a notorious playboy. It was mostly because he had a thing with Heather!

That woman was vile, and the fact that he could be into her was an instant turn-off for Karen.

As for last night, she truly approached it with the mindset of sampling some exotic fruit, no deceit intended. But who would've thought that exotic 'fruit' would come chasing after her!

"Karen, be honest. Didn't I look out for you in Swevia Country?"

"You did."

"Didn't I agree to all your requests in the end?"

"Yes, you did."

"And I even took you out for dinner on the first day. You would've starved otherwise!"

"You're not wrong there!" Karen nodded without reservation.

Seeing her react this way only puzzled Jeffrey more. "Then why the hell are you so keen on setting boundaries with me? Can't we just be friends?"

He wasn't even pressing for some kind of romantic relationship, was he?

"Nope." Karen was as succinct as ever.

Jeffrey was left speechless.

"Let me up, will you? This is really uncomfortable!" Karen gasped, feeling the weight of his body on hers.

Reluctantly, Jeffrey let her go.

As soon as Karen sat up, he grilled her, "Out with it. Why can't we even be friends?"

"I guess I'm not as enlightened as you. After sharing a bed, I can't just pretend we're nothing but platonic buddies."

It wasn't that she was clinging to what happened or that she had feelings for Jeffrey. To Karen, it just felt weird!

How could they ignore what happened and go back to being chummy, as if they hadn't been naked and intimate?

Jeffrey mused for a moment, "We could always be... less than pure friends."

"Friends with benefits?"

"Tsk, why do you have to make it sound so crude?"

Karen shook her head vehemently, "My mom would kill me if she knew!"

She never dared tell her parents anything about her life outside of home. They probably still thought she was inexperienced in

the boyfriend department.

Jeffrey scoffed, “Got any lamer excuses?”

Even the fear of Mom’s wrath was being used!

Karen chuckled nervously, “I’ve said all there is to say. Can you let me off the hook now, Mr. Turner?”

Jeffrey ran his hand through his hair, visibly flustered, searching for words, “Look... if you have other thoughts, just spill. Maybe, just maybe, I’d say yes”

Like, wanting to be his girlfriend. Not a one-night stand, not a long-term hook-up, but a girlfriend. The kind you hold hands with in public.

“Can I really say it?” Karen’s eyes widened in feigned surprise.

Jeffrey let out a silent sigh of relief, “Of course. Go ahead!”

“You sure I can say it?”

“What’s with all the dilly-dallying?”

With a sly grin and hands clasped together, Karen leaned in, “Then could you... maybe not mention last night to Everett and Dorothy? I don’t want them to know either.”

“Why are you so against swapping digits with me?”

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Any Man Can Last 2.5 Hours In Bed By Doing This (Try It Tonight)

The Sexiest Game Of 2023! Not For Kids

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Chapter 535

I know you've got the kids' backs, I'm not worried about that."

"Then why?"

Dorothy sighed deeply, "After everything that's happened, I just don't see things the same way anymore. I'm not big on planning for the future, that's all."

"Really?" Everett held her gaze, the panic and evasion in her eyes not escaping him..

"Really."

"Then follow my lead. You don't have to plan a thing, and I'll handle it." He took Dorothy's hand and gently massaged it. "Trust me this once, okay?"

She nodded, "Alright."

She trusted him to take care of the children, trusted that he wasn't the kind of man Maxton was! Even if she had to burn bridges with the Lopez family, causing a huge rift and potentially damaging the Lopez Corporation, she believed he wouldn't drag the two kids into it.

Karen had fallen asleep on the plane. She was too exhausted.

Jeffrey, sitting in the seat in front of her, had also pulled an all-nighter, but sleep eluded him!

He didn't get her WhatsApp or her phone number.

He boarded the plane with the intent to go toe-to-toe with Karen, but upon seeing her so tired that she was tearing up, her eyes bloodshot, he just couldn't bring himself to continue.

He knew all too well how rough last night had been.

Finally, the plane began its descent into Eldorria City Airport.

The captain's announcement woke Karen up. She yawned and stretched, sitting up to find a shadow blocking out all the light, casting darkness around her.

Karen frowned and looked up.

In that moment, she could only think of Jeffrey as a modern-day version of a brooding romantic lead. That expression was just too spot-on!

"What are you doing lurking around here?"

Now that she was rested, Karen's sharp tongue was back in action.

"Get off the plane with me," Jeffrey said in a tone that brooked no argument.

But Karen was the exception.

"And why should I take orders from you?"

"Because I've slept with you!"

"There's a lineup of men who've been with me, you're just..." Karen's retort was cut off as she caught the dangerous signal in Jeffrey's eyes. Especially that look, as if he wished he could bite her tongue off!

"I wasn't satisfied with the outcome of our last conversation. Let's renegotiate, Karen."

"Mr. Turner, we're in the country now Can we not drag Swevia Country's business over here? Your persistence almost makes me think you like me!"

Karen's words were off-the-cuff, but they struck Jeffrey like a gorg, leaving his head ringing.

But that wouldn't stop his quick wit.

"Don't flatter yourself. Who would like you?"

Ugh! Jeffrey wanted to slap himself for that one.

But Karen didn't get angry Instead, she laughed, "That's more like it! Since you don't like me, let's agree not to see each other again! I promise you; I won't breathe a word about last night to anyone, and I certainly won't brag about sleeping with you, Mr.

Turner. Is that good enough for you?"

“No, wait. Maybe I’m just not thinking straight because I haven’t slept. Come back to my place first, let me get my thoughts in order, and we’ll talk!”

“No way!” Karen’s refusal was as straightforward as ever. “We’re already in the country. You can call up a girl right now; it’s not hard, Mr. Turner. Have you forgotten this isn’t Swevia Country? This is Eldorria City! Your turf! Go find your lady love, your soulmate!”

Chapter 536

At this moment, the silhouette of Eldorria City Airport loomed in the distance through the airplane’s window—a stark reminder that Jeffrey’s time was running out.

He knew that if he let Karen leave without snagging her contact information, it would be game over. Whether they’d cross paths.

again was a matter left to fate. Hoping for a lead from Everett was a fool’s errand. That guy was all about his girl, Dorothy, playing the lovesick puppy in front of her. Even with his big-shot role as CEO of the Lopez Corporation, he constantly worried about tripping Dorothy’s temper. And reaching out to Dorothy herself? Fat chance! She’d already made her stance clear; she wasn’t on board.

“You don’t have to head back with me right off the bat. What do you say we grab a bite after we land? I rushed to the airport to catch you and haven’t eaten a thing. I’m starving.”

Jeffrey reached out, but Karen deftly sidestepped him.

“Can’t do. Someone’s picking me up.”

“Who? A guy or a girl?” Jeffrey’s alertness spiked instantly.

Karen frowned, finding him to be a real piece of work. “What’s it to you?”

He grabbed her wrist, halting her packing efforts. “I’m asking you. A guy or a girl?”

“A guy, okay? Happy now?”

A guy? Some dude was picking her up!

“And who might this guy be to you?” He couldn’t hide the sourness in his voice.

Karen paused, gesturing to the flight attendant who looked rather uncomfortable, “Mr. Turner, we’re about to land. Can you please. take your seat?”

“Sir, please return to your seat,” the flight attendant added, urging him along. With the presence of an audience, Jeffrey had no choice but to go back and sit down obediently.

Karen had just stowed her eye mask and travel pillow back into her carry-on when the plane touched down smoothly.

She had managed to get a decent amount of sleep during the ten-hour flight and felt refreshed. Her mind was already wandering to the sumptuous meal she'd enjoy with Kenneth and the two munchkins. She had to make sure Kenneth got the bill good and proper.

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for flying with us. We have now landed at Eldorria City Airport..."

The announcement began to play overhead.

Karen switched into her walking shoes, slung her bag over her shoulder, and made a beeline for the exit, paying Jeffrey no mind the entire time.

This left Jeffrey grinding his teeth in frustration, but he couldn't make a scene with the other passengers all getting ready to disembark.

As soon as Karen stepped off the plane, her phone rang—it was Kenneth. Hearing Kenneth's ringtone filled her with warmth. "Yeah! Just landed! Are you here now? And you got me a present... Oh, you're the best!"

Karen wasn't big on farewells but loved being picked up. It felt like there was something to look forward to.

"No lies, I really love you! And of course, I'm crashing at your place tonight. Where else would I go?"

On the other end, Kenneth couldn't help but chuckle. "I figured your folks would be eager to see you. I can drive you to them first"

"No way! Flying's too exhausting. Let's head to my parents' tomorrow."

"Sure, it's all up to you."

"Alright, I'm making my way out. I'll see you after I grab my luggage. Catch you in a bit."

With the phone call over, Karen's step quickened.

But not a few paces later, she felt someone tug at her carry-on from behind! Turning around, she was met with Jeffrey's glowering face.

Shoot, she'd forgotten all about him.

"Mr. Turner, something else you need?"

Jeffrey's eyes narrowed, and he raised an eyebrow. "Finished with your call?"

Karen nodded, "Yeah."

"So, you're going to stay with another man tonight, huh?"

Chapter 537

Karen was on edge the moment she heard those words. She had been willing to keep her cool, considering all the kindness she had received during her time in Swevia Country, but now all that was left was pure disgust.

“You eavesdropped on my call?!”

“Eavesdrop? With the way you were shouting, the whole airport could hear you blabbering about running off to some guy’s place to sleep with him!” Jeffrey was fuming, and his words were far from sugar-coated.

No one had been paying them any attention at first, but their loud quarrel had now drawn the gaze of many curious onlookers, their eyes gleaming with gossip.

The words, heavy with humiliation, were more than any girl could bear.

Karen clenched her teeth tightly. “Jeffrey, say that again, I dare you!”

“Isn’t it the truth?!” Jeffrey retorted. “You were the one on the phone saying you were going to his place to sleep over, even

planning to bring him home to meet your parents! Karen, this is clear-cut—you’ve got a boyfriend. So, what was all that about asking me if you could sleep with me back in Swevia Country?”

No sooner had Jeffrey finished speaking than Karen strode over and delivered a resounding slap across his face.

“Jeffrey, you’re disgusting!”

Spitting in contempt, she turned on her heel and bolted.

Tears streamed down her cheeks uncontrollably.

It was the first time Karen had ever felt such public humiliation. Although her family wasn’t wealthy, she had grown up

comfortable and spoiled as the only child, showered with love and never once subjected to such harsh words thanks to her sharp tongue.

Jeffrey was stunned by the slap! It hadn’t occurred to him that Karen could lash out like that.

The pain snapped him out of his rage, and as the fiery anger subsided, he became acutely aware of the snickers and entertained expressions of the onlookers.

Damn it, what had he just done?

Jeffrey might have had a string of flings, but he had never lost his composure like this. He’d never had such a fallout with an ex

before; at most, he’d avoid them or settle matters with money.

Why did everything feel different with Karen?

Annoyed with himself, Jeffrey watched Karen disappearing into the distance. He clenched his fists, hesitated for a few seconds, then decided to chase after her.

No, he couldn't let it end like this.

—

Even if it meant apologizing or whatever it took, he couldn't afford to lose contact with her now not when they were about to part ways for good.

Karen was sobbing by the time she reached the baggage claim area.

After a while, she managed to compose herself and donned a hat and mask from her carry-on bag.

She was mortified by Jeffrey's outburst and had no desire to be the subject of more whispering and pointing.

Jeffrey's harsh words forced Karen to reflect on her own actions. Indeed, she had initiated the flirtation and proposed the intimacy. Who else could she blame? All she could do now was to not provoke him anymore.

International baggage usually took its time, and the crowd was indeed thick.

While waiting, Kenneth called again.

"Are you still in there?"

"Yeah, but I should be out soon."

Kenneth, ever so attentive, sensed something was wrong immediately.

"Karen, have you been crying?"

His words made Karen's tears, which she had just fought back, start to sting her eyes again. She forced a cheerful tone to mask her red-rimmed eyes and said, "Yeah! I'm crying because I'll see you soon, I'm so happy!"

Chapter 538

From the sea of faces, Jeffrey finally spotted Karen, who was decked out in her full armor of eccentricity. She was simultaneously wiping away tears and grinning ear-to-ear, laughing as if she didn't have a care in the world while chatting on the phone and confessing that her tears were from missing him so much.

The anger Jeffrey had been trying to suppress flared up again in an instant. But after taking a few determined strides toward her, he stopped.

What was he doing to himself?

She'd rejected him so clearly. Was he really going to stick around for another slap in the face? It was obvious she had a boyfriend, one she was living with, no less. They were even planning to visit

Karen's folks the next day. Where did he fit into the picture?

Jeffrey's lips twitched, and he ran his tongue over the inside of his cheek.

Right, he was just a fancy piece of fruit. Damn fancy fruit!

At the arrivals gate, Kenneth waved frantically upon spotting Karen.

On either side of him, both Abigail and Langston tugged at his pants.

"Kenneth, pick me up! I wanna see too!"

Without a choice, since favoritism wasn't an option, he hoisted them up, one on each arm.

Karen, luggage in tow, briskly walked toward them and covered both kids' faces with kisses.

"Oh, my darlings, I've missed you to death! Goodness gracious!"

"Aunt Karen!" Abigail leaned in, angling for a hug.

Langston, however, was having none of it. He wiped off the saliva left on his cheek from her kisses and pouted, "Aunt Karen, I'm

a boy and you're a girl. You can't just kiss me like that."

"I'll kiss you if I want to!"

Kenneth set Langston down on Karen's suitcase and towed it along, speaking with gentle concern, "Lying down on the plane for so long must be tiring, right? You should stretch a bit."

"Not at all! Slept like a log" Karen said with a squint and a smile, choosing not to mention the incident with Jeffrey.

"That's good. What do you feel like eating? It's my treat."

Kenneth was always so kind and gentle. He ran his hand through Karen's hair, listening as she fiddled with her fingers, debating between wanting a fondue or craving sauerkraut fish.

As they neared his car, Kenneth suddenly asked, "Did you call Dorothy to let her know you're safe?"

"Oh, shoot! I forgot. I'll call her now," Karen said as she reached for her phone.

Then Kenneth said, "I'll do it. You go ahead and get in the car with the kids."

Karen blinked, puzzled by his offer.

"No particular reason. I just want to give her a call."

Karen hesitated, lips parting to tell him about a conversation she had with Dorothy, but ultimately, she didn't have the heart to say it. "Alright, you call. I'll get in the car with the kids."

Kenneth nodded and walked away with his phone.

The wind in Eldorria City was brisk today, tossing his hair lightly and making his coat flutter.

He found Dorothy's number, hesitated for a few seconds, and then dialed.

Dorothy answered quickly.

“Kenneth

“Hey,” he said, a smile spreading across his face at the sound of her voice.

“Just wanted to let you know, Karen’s arrived safely.

I’m about to take the kids out to eat!

“Great! Thank you, Kenneth, for looking after the kids, and thanks for...”

“You’re always thanking me. I’m getting tired of hearing it.” Kenneth teased with a smirk, “When you come back, say it to my face and treat me to a meal”

He had barely finished his sentence when he heard a man’s voice on the other end, “Dorothy, come help me with my bath.”

Chapter 539

Kenneth knew it was all Everett’s doing.

“Umm... Kenneth...” Dorothy sounded hesitant.

He chuckled, “Go ahead! He’s sick, you gotta take good care of him. I’ll be here when you get back.”

“Okay, see you later, Kenneth!”

After hanging up the phone, Kenneth looked up at the sky.

The wind in Eldorria City was fierce today, whipping around so much that his heart started to ache. He instinctively clutched at his chest, took a moment to steady himself, then headed back.

Maybe this was for the best; feeling pain meant he was still alive.

In the hospital room, Dorothy ended the call and turned to Everett.

He was smirking with a raised eyebrow, “What’s up?”

“You wanted a sponge bath, right? I’ll give you one!” she approached him, half-exasperated, half-amused. “Didn’t you say me giving you a sponge bath was like torture? Oh, I make one phone call to Kenneth and suddenly you change your mind?”

Everett wasn’t annoyed; he lay back, a lazy smile on his face, his shirt unbuttoned at the top revealing his toned chest, prominent collarbones, and those mysterious, sexy numbers.

“I haven’t changed my mind.” He paused, “It’s just that listening to you talk to Kenneth is a bigger torture than any sponge bath.”

“Without Kenneth’s help over the years, you might not have even had the chance to see me again.”

She would have been caught up in the hustle of making ends meet, raising kids, and then taking care of them alone would’ve limited her work hours. How could she have become a director at East Star Enterprises?

No matter what the future held, Dorothy couldn't forget the help she received from Karen and Kenneth.

Otherwise, how would she be any different from those who bite the hand that feeds them?

"I know." Everett was aware of Kenneth's place in Dorothy's heart, "But that doesn't stop me from being jealous."

"How childish."

The CEO of the Lopez Corporation was always whining about jealousy! She wanted to capture Everett's rogue-like demeanor right now and post it on the Lopez Corporation's official website for everyone to see what the once cool and abstinent CEO was really like!

"I'm only like this with you."

"Yeah." Dorothy sighed, "So, shall I get the water for your sponge bath?" She had almost forgotten about his obsession with cleanliness. The man couldn't stand not showering for a day without going crazy.

Everett gripped her wrist, "No need, just run me a bath."

"You want to bathe yourself? Dr. Quincy said..."

"She meant no showers. I'll only wash from the wound down."

Dorothy frowned, "Then I'll check with her again, just to be sure."

"I'm telling you it's fine, Everett repeated, with added firmness in his voice. He just couldn't stand the stickiness on his skin, nor the thought of Dorothy washing him. He'd rather deal with the wound tearing. open'

He could handle a little pain.

Dorothy knew when he made up his mind, it was final.

She had gotten too comfortable during the days they spent together in Swevia Country, forgetting that he was the decisive

Everett of the business world. Once he made a decision, he wouldn't allow anyone to change it

"Alright but be careful"

"You'll be there with me, so it'll be fine."

Dorothy was stunned, "You want me to join you... while you bathe?"

"What's left that you haven't seen?" Everett's gaze flickered, his question blunt.

Her cheeks flushed, "I don't want to see! You're the one who forced me to look!"

Chapter 540

Every time she tried to close her eyes, Everett would deliberately ease up his

grip, then jolt her back to alertness, insisting she keep her eyes open to watch him.

Several times, Dorothy bit him hard in frustration, but he seemed impervious to pain and even chuckled in response!

With a mock glare, Dorothy huffed and got up to run a bath.

Everett was a bit of a neat freak, so she took extra care to clean the bathtub thoroughly, wiping everything down before finally turning on the taps.

Before she could finish, she suddenly felt arms envelop her from behind! She paused for a second, then with a sigh, turned around.

“What now?”

“Help me with my shirt, will you?”

Dorothy pushed him gently. “Your hands aren’t broken.”

“But I want you to do it. With that, he stretched out his arms, and his loosely worn shirt gaped open, revealing a glimpse of his sculpted abs.

Everett’s lips curved into a sly smile, his Adam’s apple sharp and bobbing with his breath, almost as if tempting her to leave her unique mark with a bite.

No matter how many times Dorothy saw this, her heart would still race, and her cheeks would flush.

“Can you stop fooling around? I’m leaving!”

“No way.”

With one swift motion, Everett pulled her close, breathing softly into her ear, where a tiny mole resided, and spoke in a husky voice, “Where are you running off to? I’m just taking a bath.”

Dorothy didn’t buy it for a second!

Especially when it came to these matters, he was full of lies, with “just one last time” being the phrase she heard most often.

“The water’s ready, you can sit and bathe.”

How old was he to still need company? Clearly, he had other things on his mind!

“What if I faint from the steam?”

“Doubtful, but okay.”

“I’m serious, just a bath.” Everett caught her hand and placed it on the buttons of his shirt. “Unbutton this for me.”

This man, really! Dorothy rolled her eyes but helped him with the remaining buttons and took off his shirt.

His wounds were still visible, streaked with blood and the faint yellow of iodine, front and back, due to the through—and-through

injury.

Unconsciously, her hand reached out to touch. "It must hurt... Did it hurt a lot that day?"

"Not really, just felt a bit cold."

"You're lying to me!"

Everett lifted her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes. "I'm not lying; it didn't hurt."

Dorothy's lips pouted, and tears threatened to spill.

Lately, her tear ducts had become a shallow well, always on the verge of overflowing.

"I don't believe you. Even a paper cut hurts me, and you had an entire dagger in you!"

With the pad of his thumb, Everett gently wiped away her falling tears, and when they kept coming, he simply leaned in to kiss them away.

The salty, slightly bitter taste unfolded in his mouth.

"You're not allowed to cry, Dorothy

"Then you're not allowed to do such things again! Everett, you carry so much on your shoulders, and the whole Lopez

Corporation is counting on you. My life isn't worth it!"

Everett's brow furrowed, "Whether it's worth it or not is for me to decide."

"Do you realize how afraid I am of the possibility of you dying?" Since the incident, Dorothy had developed a phobia of the word "death". Even hearing it made her tremble uncontrollably.

She would never forget arriving in Swevia Country, witnessing Amanda's heart-wrenching sobs.

Dorothy truly thought he was gone.

Everett smirked, "You have so many admirers. If I died, it would just make it easier for them."

Annoyed, Dorothy snapped, "Oh, shut up!"

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Chapter 541

"You think Kenneth wouldn't jump at the chance to take over if I die?"

It had taken him a decade of relentless pursuit to secure his position at the helm, and there was no way he'd let it slip through his fingers that easily.

"He's not the sleazeball you're making him out to be!"

"Hmph. Everett scoffed, "I'm a man"

And if there's one thing a man knew, it was what other men were thinking! Dorothy hated hearing anyone speak ill of Kenneth. She urged, "You should take a shower."

"I still have my pants on"

"You can handle that part yourself!"

Knowing he had pushed her enough today and risking her actually leaving, Everett steadied Dorothy with one hand while he slipped off his sweatpants with the other.

She kept her eyes tightly shut the entire time, refusing to sneak even a peek! Fortunately, Everett's wound was on his upper body. Nothing happened to him as long as he dodged the wound, He even didn't get his cloth wet

Since he couldn't raise his arms high, it was Dorothy who washed his hair. It was her first time tending to someone like this, and she was a bit clumsy. Her nails even accidentally scraped his cheek, but it didn't dampen Everett's spirits.

While toweling off, she sighed, "You're going to be scarred front and back.' Such deep wounds were bound to leave their mark.

"That's why I'm thinking maybe I should get a tattoo of Abigail and Langston's birthdays. What do you think?"

Dorothy's towel-folding hands paused, 'Maybe not..."

"So, it's only okay if the marks are yours?"

"That's not what I meant!"

She just thought tattoos were painful, and the inflammation and redness afterward just weren't worth it.

"They're my only kids. I want to tattoo their birthdays and names.

Dorothy sensed something amiss, "Why just those two? You're still young!"

"It meant what I said the other time; he was serious about getting a vasectomy.

If that's what it took to keep Dorothy, who always let her own imagination run wild, from worrying, he would do it.

"Don't!" she quickly interjected, "I don't want you doing that surgery!"

"Why not?"

"Just... don't! Why undergo a life-altering procedure when everything's fine? You're the CEO of Lopez Corporation. Your family might as well have a 'throne' to inherit."

Everett's gaze fixed on her, "Abigail and Langston are enough. They're my children" Dorothy didn't reply.

"What, you want more kids?" he asked.

Dorothy frowned, knowing this man always kept his word. If he actually went through with a vasectomy, it would be on her conscience.

"We can't predict the future. What if I want more later?"

Everett tried to gauge the sincerity of her words, 'Aren't two enough?"

"Your genes are too good; two isn't enough"

"Ah. Everett let out a soft sigh, 'Dorothy, I can provide for however many kids we have, but I worry about your health"

He knew all too well the toll childbirth took on a woman's body.

The joy of new life was one thing, but Dorothy's well-being was the most paramount thing.

"Sounds like you're planning on more right now" Having finished drying his hair, Dorothy neatly folded the towel, 'Just don't go through with the surgery yet"

He nodded, "Alright, I'll listen to you"

As Dorothy went to get the hairdryer, Everett's phone on the table rang.

She glanced down and saw it was Jeffrey.

Handing Everett the phone, she said, "It's Jeffrey.'

Everett pressed the answer button and Jeffrey's voice came through, sounding muffled and unenthusiastic.

"Karen's got a boyfriend! I was played!"

Chapter 542

Everett and Dorothy exchanged a glance—one puzzled, the other inquiring
What do you mean?

Karen's got a boyfriend! He even picked her up from the airport and she's also staying at his place tonight

Jeffrey was fuming with an anger he couldn't dispell

"Did you just get back home? He had left in such a hurry last time so no one knew if he had actually met Karen at the airport

And now, all of a sudden, he even knew who had picked her up!

"Yeah, I did the idiot, got on that plane behind her, thinking we could have a civilized chat Instead, she runs off with some other guy!" Jeffrey's tone was that of a man who'd had his wife stolen.

Dorothy, having heard enough, pieced together what had happened

Where did Karen get a boyfriend?

To be precise, she hadn't had one in years! For the past four or five years, she'd been helping out with little Abigail, occasionally taking some freelance design work, but it was always from home. She hadn't

even a glimpse of a man in her life, not to mention a boyfriend

“That was her cousin, Dorothy clarified, not wanting Karen to get a bad rap over a misunderstanding

“What? Jeffrey’s voice pitched up in surprise, and it took him a moment to continue. “Everett! Are you on speaker again?”

Dorothy snorted. No one wants to eavesdrop on your conversation. I’m drying Everett’s hair”

No, wait, what did you just say? Karen’s cousin picked her up”

Dorothy ignored him and continued to focus on the task at hand.

Everett, seeing that she had no intention of playing matchmaker for Jeffrey and Karen, didn’t want to disobey

So he cleared his throat lightly. “Uh, yeah, Kenneth called. He’s picked up Karen.”

Silence fell on Jeffrey’s end.

Everett was about to hang up when Jeffrey finally spoke up. “Everett, can you get Dorothy to give me Karen’s number? Nope”

“Are we not friends“”

“Jeffrey, remember what I asked you at the hospital?”

The line went dead again

“Goodbye, if you’re back in the country come to the office tomorrow. Give Kevin a break”

Everett disconnected the call outright.

Dorothy gave him a curious look, “What did you say to Jeffrey?”

“Tasked him if he was so interested in Karen, would he marry her?”

Dorothy frowned. “Even if he would, she wouldn’t marry a playboy like him”

Everett chuckled softly. He said he wouldn’t marry her. Don’t worry”

I’m telling you, don’t meddle in Jeffrey and Karen’s business! I know Karen, and if she wanted anything to do with Jeffrey she would have given him her contact info herself”

“Don’t worry. I’m not into playing Cupid“

Dorothy sighed heavily a hint of concern in her voice.

“If Jeffrey doesn’t want to marry Karen, then why is he chasing after her? No, I need to warn Karen to be careful”

Jeffrey was trouble—he was partying hard and living a hedonistic lifestyle, but completely oblivious to what love was

Everett reached for her hand as he suddenly asked. “If I were like Jeffrey, would you still “”

“No.” Dorothy answered bluntly “I cant stand men like that”

He was unbridled and reckless just like Maxton, who used their base desires as their compass

To them, love was the most trivial thing. It didn't deserve to be cherished. They even took pride in their infidelities, calling it charm and sophistication.

Chapter 543

"Dorothy, you're the only one for me

Everett could tell she was thinking of her father again, so his grip on her hand tightened without him realizing it

Dorothy believed him, she really did But she didn't want Everett to be set on just her

Jeffrey was completely dumbfounded.

How on earth had he not figured out that the person Karen was chatting with on the phone was Kenneth, her cousin?

Locking back, it made sense. Her laughter, the way she talked about crashing at his place, it all seemed so casual, lacking that coy vibe you get when talking to a boyfriend

It was all his own doing—acting on impulse without considering other possibilities

Now the question was, how could he find Karen?

Irritated, Jeffrey kicked the living room couch and grabbed his phone to scroll through his contacts list in a frenzy

Suddenly, it hit him that Karen had once mentioned working at The Prosperity Consortium! She was there with Dorothy before

Everett had pulled some strings to get Dorothy transferred to the headquarters.

Jumping to his feet, Jeffrey started searching for the number of the manager at The Prosperity Consortium's local branch

The phone was picked up promptly. The voice on the other end sounded deferential

Mr. Turner, what can I do for you?"

Have your HR department check if someone named Karen used to work at The Prosperity Consortium."

"Absolutely, sir! I'll take care of it immediately"

After hanging up. Jeffrey put down his phone, grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge, and checked his phone again new messages.

Stepping out to the balcony for a quick smoke, he returned to still find no update

It shouldn't be this hard to find someone!

As Jeffrey was about to reach for his car keys by the entrance, his phone finally buzzed.

He answered it instantly.

"Mr. Turner, there was indeed a lady named Karen on our records. She worked here but resigned years ago."

Do you have her contact number? Any way to reach her?"

"Yes, I'll send it to you right away"

A grin spread across Jeffrey's face, and he snapped his fingers without even thinking.

He was on to something

Dialing the number sent by The Prosperity Consortium manager, he was surprised to find the call connected – she hadn't changed her number

As he watched the dialing screen switch to a call timer, ready to speak, a female voice beat him to it.

"Hello?"

The voice was unmistakably Dorothy's

"Hello?" she repeated.

Jeffrey was speechless, "Isn't this Karen's number? Why do you have her phone?"

It took Dorothy a few seconds to recover from the surprise of hearing Jeffrey's voice, "She gave me her old number and I've been using it. What do you want with her?"

Jeffrey didn't answer promptly.

"Jeffrey I just want you to stay away from my friend, alright? You do your thing, but Karen's not that sort of girl And didn't you say it yourself that you are not marrying her? So don't waste her time or yours."

"Everett just threw that question at me out of nowhere I didn't have anything serious with her then so I certainly hadn't thought about marriage!"

Back in the hospital, there hadn't been anything solid between him and Karen, so where did marriage come into it?

But things had changed since then!

"So what about now? Are you ready to marry her now?"

Jeffrey ran a hand through his hair, frustrated Dorothy's question caught him off guard

He could easily lie, but on the other end of the line was Karen's best friend, and the girlfriend of his own best mate. How could he lie to her?

I haven't figured it out yet I asked Karen. She doesn't like you,"

Jeffrey was silent on this side

"Just when Everett asked if you'd marry her, I asked Karen too. She said she's not into you"

With a flick of his wrist, he pulled out a cigarette from the pack, lit it up, and took a harsh drag. The smoke quickly escaped from

his nostrils before he blew it away, watching it dissipate into nothingness

Yeah

Karen didn't want anything more to do with him

She made it crystal clear, and the only one who seemed desperate was him!

"Fuck," Jeffrey muttered under his breath. He grabbed his car keys as he dialed his friend's number, "Hey got any plans tonight?"

"The man, the myth, the Turner is back? Hell yeah, we do! Got some fresh faces at the club, and bro, we've got all shapes and

sizes"

"Alright" Jeffrey said as he finished his cigarette and crushed it underfoot. I'm on my way

"You got it, man! We'll throw you a welcome back bash. I'll make sure the ladies are out in force

Jeffrey chuckled, the old roguish spark returning to his eyes

Women, huh?

Turned off the lights, and they were all the same. Who needed Karen anyway? He wouldn't even answer the door if she knocked

He left his place and had just settled into his car when his phone buzzed

It was a text from the Prosperity Consortium's head.

[Mr. Turner, I've sent you Karen's home address and her info]

Jeffrey barely glanced at it. He didn't even bother to open the message before he tossed the phone onto the passenger seat and

floored the gas pedal

The Charm Night Bar was a place where time stood still.

Jeffrey was a regular, a fixture of the night scene. Everyone, from the owner to the bartenders, knew him by name

"Look who it is, Mr. Turner! Quick on the draw tonight" greeted Wesley, one of Jeffrey's cronies. Wesley, a sort of silver spoon

rebel, owned a shopping center in Eldoria City

He stood to welcome Jeffrey who sauntered in with his usual laid-back swagger and ordered a drink, settling into a booth

"What's with the bandage on your head man? A lover's scratch? Wesley teased, nodding toward the bandage on Jeffrey's head.

Drop it. Let's just drink, Jeffrey said while he flicked his tongue against his cheek, his gaze swept over the crowd. Haven't been here for a while Lots of new faces"

"Just wait introduce them to your Wesley said, raising an eyebrow and heading off

Whatever he said worked like a charm because when he came back, a bevy of beauties trailed behind him, each more curvaceous than the last

"Say hi to Mr. Turner

"Hello, Mr. Turner Those women's eyes lit up at the sight of him. It wasn't every day they saw someone as slick and obviously well off as Jeffrey

Eyeing the bottles on the table, Jeffrey lounged back with a careless smirk on his lips, "Tonight, the lady who drinks the most gets to leave with me"

Wesley was all for it, "What are you waiting for? Didn't you hear Mr. Turner? Drink up?"

The women giggled and scrambled for a seat, each eager to be the chosen one

Jeffrey used to love seeing the scene that they spelled the wine While doing this, they were all vying for his attention. And some of them, who feigned innocence at first, almost fell with him to show off their curves at last

"So, what do you think? Wesley slapped Jeffrey's shoulder. Not bad, right?

They're all college girls from around here Whichever you pick, I've got the room ready"

He even slipped a card into Jeffrey's shirt pocket after his words.

"Fuck," Jeffrey laughed, lighting another cigarette "You've got it all figured out, don't you?"

"Of course, man. Friends take care of each other! Got your eye on anyone?"

Chapter 545

Jeffrey hadn't really hit the booze hard, instead, he'd chain smoked his way through an entire pack of cigarettes.

After the lights came up and the music died down, he led the girl in the white dress out of the bar, right next to the hotel where his buddy Wesley had conveniently booked a room.

Jeffrey fished the key card from his pocket with a flick of his fingers and tossed it to her, 'Go on up, I'm gonna grab another pack of smokes."

She nodded and lowered her gaze, and was almost embarrassed to meet his eyes, “Okay”

Perhaps it was the high heels rubbing her the wrong way but she was taking her sweet time walking, pausing every now and then

Scratching his stubble, Jeffrey made a beeline for the convenience store, picked up a new pack, and lit one up as he strolled back to the hotel

The streetlights flickered erratically casting his chiseled profile in a dance of light and shadow

Before heading up, he glanced at his phone: a message from his folks about dropping by the next day a bunch of emails from his secretary with documents to review, and a text from the head of the Prosperity Consortium

His eyes narrowed at the address, it was in an old neighborhood of Eldorria City, far from the Consortium’s usual haunts. It didn’t sound like Karen’s rental but more like her parents’ place.

But what did he care?

Pocketing his phone, he strode into the hotel and rapped on the door with his knuckles. The woman opened it, still blushing like a shy schoolgirl, her face and ears were both flushed with red

Jeffrey walked in, plopped down on the bed and looked her over. “What’s your name?”

“Caren”

He choked on his smoke, “What did you say?”

Startled by his sudden outburst, she shrank back, “My name is Caren, which starts with the letter C

“Of all the luck. “Jeffrey massaged his temple and suddenly felt irritable, “Why are you acting so skittish? Speak up. If you don’t want to be here, you can leave”

“No, Mr. Turner,” Caren quickly explained, “Im a college student. It’s my first night at Charm Night”

“And?”

“I.. I’ve never had a boyfriend before...”

For the first time, Jeffrey really looked at her. She wore a tight-fitting skirt that showcased her figure, but there was an undeniable air of discomfort about her. And her high heels had rubbed her skin raw, hinting at a painful redness

“A virgin?”

She nodded timidly

He stood up abruptly and pulled out his phone, "Show me your bank details"

Confused, Caren asked, "Why?"

"Just do it!"

She fumbled with her phone and brought up it

Jeffrey took a drag from his cigarette, punched in a number, sent the payment, and then crushed the cigarette in the ashtray.

"You can go now. I'm not into virgins."

That could be too much hassle

Caren browsed the sum he transferred before she turned to look at Jeffrey.

Mr. Turner, I didn't come with you for money"

"Then why? For love? Jeffrey let out a cynical laugh as he sat back down

"Sweetheart, I'm just out for some fun."

Tears suddenly streamed down Caren's face, "I really thought I liked you, that's why I came willingly. I'm not here for the money I can send it back"

Realizing she might be sincere, Jeffrey quickly stood up and snuffed out his last cigarette, Forget about liking me. I've got a girlfriend"

"Time to go. Stay in the room if you want, leave if you don't Goodbye, It was the first time Jeffrey had ever left a woman alone in a hotel room and ran out by himself.

Back in his car, he couldn't help but glance at that text from the Prosperity Consortium head again.

Should he take a gamble and go to the foot of Karen's parents building?

Chapter 546

He scrapped against the leather with restless irritation

Damn it, Jeffrey why the hell would you go after her? A heartless woman he cursed himself

But the thought of hitting another bar or club didn't appeal to him anymore so he just drove back to his apartment.

Elysian Country, the Lopez Estate

Heather's mother had to seek Amanda's help because Heather was nowhere to be found

Amanda answered the phone with ease, 1 have no idea where that girl has run off for It's been ages since we've spoken"

"I'm afraid something's happened to herr

"It shouldn't be. Maybe she just needed to clear her head so she took a little trip to unwind. Don't worry about it

After offering a few comforting words, Amanda hung up the phone.

She called over the butler with a flick of her wrist, "Where did the master go?
"He's out said something about hitting the golf course

Amanda raised an eyebrow. "So he won't be back for hile?"

"Seems likely" The butler nodded. Shall I call him for you, ma'am?

"No need. If he gets back before I do, just tell him I went shopping and give me a ring. Don't let on"

The butler didn't dare to press for more He responded and promptly arranged for the chauffeur to take Amanda away

Amanda dressed down in casual wear. She donned a hat and a mask to cover her face, and also instructed the driver to take a

few extra turns around downtown before heading to the final destination

It was a secluded house in the suburbs, guarded and with windows nailed shut so tight not even a fly could escape

Upon seeing the car arrive, the guard on duty bowed respectfully

"Mrs. Lopez"

"How is she?" Amanda stepped out of the car and scanned the interior

"Same as always, ranting and raving. She's been eating well, though. We've followed your orders and kept her indoors."

Amanda waved them aside to stand clear

That's right, the one confined inside was Heather

When they had sent Everett off to Swevia Country they had Heather detained and placed under house arrest right here

Because Jonathan had forbidden his wife to visit, Amanda had to sneak in to see her

Amanda entered alone. She didn't worry about Heather causing any harm, there was another layer of iron bars keeping her securely locked away

Heather stirred at the sound of someone entering Upon seeing Amanda, she immediately stood up. Her eyes lit up as if she saw

the Silverline, "Amanda, you finally came! Please, let me out?"

Amanda frowned at Heather. Her tone was laced with disapproval and irritation.

"How can I let you out? You've hurt my son!"

"Amanda. I was in total despair I loved him so much that I wanted to kill him and then die with him!" Heather's hands clutched the

bars. Her appearance was haggard and disheveled from the lack of sunlight.

"Haven't I always told you to keep your cool? Why don't you ever listen? Now look what's happened. I can't help you anymore.

The fact that you're still alive is the last favor I can do for you" Amanda said firmly "You saved my life once, and I've repaid you

many times over We're even. But the moment you laid hands on Everett, I can't help you anymore"

"What are you saying?"

"Give up on the idea of being a Lopez by marriage. Everett's father is already looking for a new suitor

Chapter 547

Panic struck Heather as she desperately pounded against the barrier in front of her.

"Oh, come on, Amanda! You've got to help me! Everett is mine, he belongs to me!"

"You know, Jonathan would still be fond of you if you didn't mess this up. I've sung your praises to him more times than I can count. But you just had to go and let yourself down! Did you ever think about me when you were plotting your tragedy with Everett? He's the only son I have! * Did Heather ever think about her, seeing her only boy covered in blood, lying in an ambulance? The mere thought made Amanda's hands tremble uncontrollably. Heather pledged hastily, "There won't be a next time! I swear I'll take good care of him. I'll handle his business affairs, and I won't hurt him anymore, Amanda..I truly regret it!"

"Regret won't fix anything now. Just stay put for the time being. If I can smooth things over with Jonathan, til let you out. If not...well, you might just have to pay with your life"

Amanda was about to leave with that.

She felt utterly disappointed about Heather.

How many times had she gone against the wishes of her husband and son to support Heather? "Take your time," she had always advised, "the Lopez family only recognizes you as their daughter-in-law. What do you have to fear?"

Heather, who realized she was truly going to be left to her own devices, suddenly called out, "Amanda! You remember what happened with Dorothy's mom, don't you"

Amanda froze, then slowly turned to face her, "What now, you want to threaten me?"

"No, Heather said, peering through the slats of the railing.

"I want to remind you that we thought we had destroyed all the evidence and dealt with everyone involved. But when I went back to double-check the flash drives with the security footage, I noticed one was missing!"

"What?!"

Amanda's heart started to race.

'Do you know if someone took it?'

Heather shook her head, "I have no idea! That's why I'm telling you. I'm afraid Dorothy might have gotten her hands on it"

"Why didn't you say something sooner?"

Amanda was genuinely panicked now.

This meant that their cleanup might not have been as thorough as they believed.

Maybe the flash drives were really lost, not to mention that the footage was already erased.

But what if Dorothy really got the flash drive?! With Heather's recent actions already straining Amanda's relationship with her husband, the last thing they needed was for Dorothy's mother's case to resurface.

The consequences were unimaginable.

"I didn't dare tell you. I was afraid you'd scold me for incompetence!"

Heather's voice broke into a sob.

"Amanda... I truly see you as my own mother. Even if I hadn't married Everett, I would still respect you deeply! I made a mistake, and I deserve to be punished. You can yell at me, hit me, even kill me, but please... please forgive me. I was utterly hopeless back then. Seeing him rush to save Dorothy without a second thought, I just lost it!"

"You."

Amanda wanted to continue her reproach but found herself at a loss for words, "I understand your feelings, too, but I'm getting old, and Everett is my only son.

And you are the only girl in your family. How could you not think of that?" "I told you that I was totally insane! I was out of my mind!"

"Alright, I'll look into the missing flash drive. As for you... just stop causing trouble. Stay here quietly and don't provoke Jonathan's anger anymore"

Chapter 548

Amanda crushed back to the Lopez Estate, grateful that Jonathan hadn't yet returned from the golf course.

Her outing had been a stealthy affair, unnoticed by prying eyes.

She had intended to visit Heather out of old loyalty, but what she hadn't expected was to come away with a piece of information that set her on edge.

After giving it some thought, she dialed her son's number.

The phone rang several times before Everett picked up.

"Mother"

Hearing that familiar word brought Amanda a moment of comfort.

"Hey! How's the recovery coming along? Still in pain?"

"I'm fine"

Everett's response was as succinct as ever, void of any unnecessary embellishment. It had always been like this.

Even before Everett met Dorothy, conversations between mother and son had been brief, usually cut short by his work commitments.

Amanda felt isolated.

She was struggling to bridge the gap to her son's life, which was why she cherished Heather's presence so much.

Heather was young and worked close to Everett; she provided Amanda with snippets of her son's life as well as companionship in conversation.

"So, Dorothy...is she taking good care of you?"

Amanda hesitated before asking.

She was majorly assessing if Dorothy had got the flash drive by probing Everett's attitude.

She thought that if Dorothy had solid evidence, she would definitely tell Everett and stir trouble between her and her son.

"She's doing great."

"Ah, well, I guess there's not much I can say. Your father's running the show now, and I'm stepping back. Just call me if you need anything, and don't forget to send a message every now and then! Everett, no matter what, I'm your mother. You were born after a difficult ten-month pregnancy, and I nearly traded my life for yours. How could I not care for you?"

"Sure, I will"

After hanging up, Amanda let out a sigh of relief.

It seemed that Dorothy hadn't found anything yet.

After all, the surveillance footage had been destroyed.

Even if Dorothy got the flash drive, it would be empty.

What was there to fear? She had been worrying over nothing.

Amanda patted her chest to calm her nerves and called out to the butler, 'Come on, let's go out to the driveway and wait for the master. He should be returning soon, night?'

"Yes, Mrs. Lopez!"

In the hospital, Everett was explaining the latest strategic shifts in the industry

to Dorothy.

"By adopting a bank model combining merchant and investment, we can build a better relationship with banks.

If we analyze from these angles, namely the factory's construction, production, Operational management, employee payroll, as well as mergers and acquisitions, the model will benefit the in-depth collaboration between both parties"

He spoke with authority, while Dorothy listened intently and jotted down notes. Whenever she was confused, she'd look up with a questioning gaze.

And like sharing a brain, Everett instantly understood and patiently broke it down for her again.

"Our overseas companies, which are often widespread, can help the group to make the accounts of domestic and international subsidiaries transparent. That can further facilitate direct bank-corporate connectivity and other group management functions."

Dorothy nodded.

She couldn't help but be impressed by Everett's intellect.

His ideas were always innovative, meeting company needs while simplifying management.

"So, the Lopez Corporations next move is to focus more internationally, right?"

"That's the general plan. We're not ruling out the possibility of a sudden, favorable overseas opportunity"

Everett glanced at her, a slight smile playing on his lips.

"Thinking of leading a project on your own?"

'Me?"

Dorothy blinked, taken aback, then shook her head.

'No, I couldn't possibly lead one."

Chapter 549

"When you were at East Star Enterprises and leading the project for Everglow City Resort, I thought you did a great job"

Dorothy grunted, "That was all Austin's show; I was just his sidekick, mainly supervising! For each project in the Lopez

Corporation, its budget was an astronomical number. I don't dare to lead any of them* "You'll have to step up eventually"

"Huh?"

Everett leaned in close and whispered in her ear, 'The CEO's wife of the Lopez Corporation has to have the ability to stand on her own two feet, right?"

CEO's wife...

Those words sounded like a cruel joke to Dorothy.

That ship had sailed for her.

"I'm not the one."

Everett's face darkened in an instant, his gaze fixed on her, "So you're not planning on registering our Marriage after going back home?"

Dorothy shifted her gaze guiltily, "Let's focus on your recovery first. Those things aren't important"

"How can they not be important?"

Everett had noticed that recently, whenever such topics arose, Dorothy either changed the subject or dodged the question — she

never really wanted to talk about it, "Do you want Abigail and Langston to keep growing up in a broken home?" he asked.

"It's pretty solid, isn't it? Now they even have a dad"

Dorothy feigned ignorance.

"Dorothy, look at me"

It was a cold command from Everett.

But Dorothy shrank back; she even stood up and stepped farther away, "I'm going to find Dr. Quincy to change your dressing. Rest

a bit: we'll talk when I get back!"

She bolted as if Everett might chase after her.

Once the door was closed behind her, Dorothy leaned against it, gasping for breath.

That was close, too close! But always avoiding the issue like this could only work so many times, and she knew it would get

harder to escape! Dorothy didn't want to give Everett false hope, and didn't want to plan a future that was never going to happen.

If things changed, he'd be too disappointed.

She knew the taste of waking from a beautiful dream all too well.

It was bitter.

The next morning, Karen was woken by the playful noise of Abigail and Langston outside.

With her hair all over the place, she shuffled out, stretching.

"Why are you guys up so early?"

"Aunt Karen, it's you who slept in!"

Abigail chirped as she ran over, clutching the candy Kenneth had bought her the day before.

Langston, with his laptop in his arms, glanced at her from the couch, "Aunt Karen, if you're not diligent, you'll never get married!"

"Pfft! Stinky Langston. See if I don't snatch that laptop away"

Karen threatened as she moved towards him.

Langston hugged his laptop and scampered off in a panic.

Kenneth came out of the kitchen just in time to see the commotion "Alright! Breakfast is ready"

He poured milk for everyone and divided the toast and fried eggs.

Karen quickly dashed back to her room to wash her face, then came out smiling at Kenneth, "Brother, you're the best!"

"Eat up.I'll drive you to your mom and dad's afterward"

"Aren't you coming with me?"

Kenneth took a seat, 'I would have, but there's a glitch with a school project.I need to fix it and send it over from my computer.Besides, Abigail and Langston would feel out of place at your mom and dad's without you.I'll stay behind.Give them my regards, will you?"

"Sure!"

Karen nodded and started on her breakfast.

After a while, Kenneth found a moment to drive Karen back to her parents'.

At the curb, Karen waved non-stop, beaming, "Drive safe!"

"Mhm, head up now!"

Watching Kenneth's car drive away, Karen turned to go inside when her eyes caught a flashy sports car parked in the complex - definitely a new sight in the neighborhood

Chapter 550

The neighborhood wasn't exactly run-down.

It once fetched a pretty penny back in the day, even though the buildings had seen better years.

But a million-dollar sports car parked in these parts? That was a head-scratcher.

The residents here weren't exactly the high-roller types.

Curiosity got the better of Karen as she stole a few more glances in that direction, only to catch a glimpse of someone familiar perched inside the car.

As she edged closer, her eyes widened in recognition—it was Jeffrey.

What on earth was he doing here? Startled, Karen stumbled backward, nearly taking a tumble on the pavement.

Luckily, the car's occupant seemed to be fast asleep.

His eyes shut tight, hands clutching his coat, his body curled up as if to ward off the chill.

When did he even get here, and why was he snoozing in his car? That man

was like a bad penny that always came back into her pocket Karen rolled her eyes and made to skedaddle, but fate had other plans.

She bumped into a chatty neighbor just back from a grocery run, who waved enthusiastically.

"Karen! Look who's back!"

Oh, great.

Just what she needed—the person in the car to hear.

Without daring a backward glance to check if Jeffrey had stirred, she waved half-heartedly and quickened her pace.

"Karen!" Jeffrey called behind her.

Karen gasped.

Her back turned taut as she slowly twisted around, wearing a look of pure doom, "Mr. Turner, please tell me you're not here for me"

"Or what?" Jeffrey quipped.

His eyes were still bleary from sleep, and if Karen was any closer, she might've spotted the crust in the comers.

But even sleep-disheveled, he managed to look effortlessly cool.

His presence drew stares and double-takes in this quaint part of town.

People thought a celebrity had just graced the sidewalks.

"You needed something?' Karen found herself dragging him aside, away from prying eyes. The last thing she wanted was this spectacle reaching her parents' ears.

"Of course I need something."

Jeffrey's shirt crinkled under her pull, which seemed to amuse him "So, spill it, What's this all about?"

"I'm here to let you take your responsibility for me.' he said, arms crossed, giving her a pointed look.

"As adults, we should face the consequences of our actions, don't you think?"

Karen gaped, 'Consequences? You're not seriously hitting me up for a refund on a plane ticket, are you?"

Because that would be absurd.

"How did you leap to plane tickets?"

Now it was Jeffrey's tum to be baffled.

"Back at the hotel! entrance, when you asked if I was up for it, I took it as a sign that you wanted me to be your boyfriend. That's why I said yes."

"Bull! I never said any such thing!* She had merely asked a simple question!

"Maybe you didn't, but I'm old-school. I only sleep

with someone if they're my girlfriend. You slept with me, so now you have to be my girlfriend"

Karen rolled her eyes so hard she thought they might stick.

If they weren't in public, she'd have given him a piece of her mind for his shamelessness.

"Are you short on girlfriends, or what's your deal?"

Karen narrowed her eyes, pointing an accusing finger at him.

"Ah! I get it now. You're out for revenge, right? My calling you out bruised your ego!"

He shrugged, feigning innocence, "Not at all. I'm just here to make you take the toll."

"Cut the crap and get lost! I've got a house to get back to!"

She didn't have time for this nonsense "Going home? Great, I'll join you. Might as well meet your folks."

Karen stopped dead in her tracks and glared back, "Are you psycho?"

He nodded, playing along, "Yes. And you promised to take me to the hospital."

"I did no such thing!"

Jeffrey pretended not to hear her protest.

He just grabbed her hand and steered her towards her parents' building.

Panicked, Karen struggled, "What are you trying to do?"

"Didn't you say that if you and I ended up as sex buddies, your mom would skin you alive? I'd love to see that happen"