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"Alright."

Dorothy nodded in agreement.

She had her own agenda. She figured that once Kenneth laid eyes on Everett, he'd further cut his losses and move on. Dragging this out for years had been enough, and any further delay would only deepen his misguided attachment.

After helping Everett out of the tub, Dorothy went the extra mile to blow-dry his hair before letting him leave the steamy bathroom. The man's wounds were stubborn healers, and the last thing they needed was the flu. That could turn the wound into an infection.

She took a quick shower herself, carelessly splashing water before slipping into a bathrobe and wandering out to join him.

Everett was planted in front of the computer. Head slightly bowed, he was deep in conversation with Kevin about some business matter.

Dorothy found a spot where she could gaze at his profile undisturbed, a small indulgence she allowed herself. Watching Everett work was, in its own right, a form of pleasure.

Sometimes he'd pause and frown a little, and his jawline would go taut with concentration. Other times, he'd nod slightly in agreement, though his expression always remained cool and detached, and his firmly sealed lips seldom gave a smile away.

Everett was the epitome of untouchable royalty, his approval feeling like a blessing from on high.

Dorothy watched for a while, then sneakily pulled out her phone to capture the moment with a photo again.

Flipping through the pictures, she realized Everett's piercing gaze was fixed on her. His eyes were deep and enigmatic, with a lot of thoughts hidden behind.

"Why aren't you back in bed?" he asked, closing the laptop and turning to her with a frank stare.

She pocketed her phone with a smile, "You were on a video conference. I didn't want to be caught lounging in bed in the background."

"What's there to be afraid of?"

She sighed with exasperation in her voice, "You're the CEO! It wouldn't look good if your employees saw someone in bed during a meeting. It would ruin your superior image."

Everett reached out and pulled her onto his lap.

"We've named the new project."

"Oh? What's it called?" she asked, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"Dawn to Dusk."

"Is that the resort project in Havenbrook City I saw the other day?"

He nodded, "Yes."

"Round and round like dawn to dusk, right?" she mused, recalling a lyric out of the blue.

"No, it's about the other lyric, 'I will be with you from dusk to dawn'. That's a vow of eternal commitment."

Dorothy raised an eyebrow in surprise, "Aren't those two songs using the same two words?"

"But with a different meaning."

He didn't want to soothe himself by a lyric such as "round and round". What he wanted was a bond that couldn't be severed by time or distance.

It seemed Dorothy caught his drift. She was first chuckling and then sighing softly, "Do you ever regret going to school in Havenbrook City?"

If it weren't for the Lopez family business expanding in Havenbrook City, he wouldn't have stooped to attend middle school there, and he wouldn't have met someone as ordinary as her.

He cracked a half-smile, "I only regret that letter. I should've read it to you right then and there."

Instead of leaving it on her desk and making her return it unopened.

Dorothy paused, then her eyes twinkled mischievously, "If you had done that, I would've asked the teacher to change my seat."

Back in her school days, she hadn't given a thought to dating. Sure, there were boys who chased her, and there was a lot. But all she cared about was earning extra cash to help with her mother's medical bills, or maybe buying a few extra test prep books.

"It wouldn't have mattered. The teacher wouldn't have agreed to it."

"Why not?"

"Because I wouldn't have allowed it." The head teacher wouldn't dare cross him.

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Dorothy furrowed her brow slightly, finding Everett's imperious tone a bit too much to handle.

But upon reflection, his words weren't an exaggeration. Who would dare cross the Lopezes? When a Lopez scion spoke, it was as good as law.

"Wait a sec... you didn't ask the teacher to seat us together, did you?"

His lips curled in a secretive smile, "That's for me to know."

She scoffed.

In one smooth motion, Everett swept her up from her chair.

Dorothy yelped in surprise, "Put me down, quick! You can't stretch the wound!"

"A stretch more or less won't make a difference now," he said. His arms were flexing as he held her, and the muscle tone was all too apparent. Coupled with the gold-rimmed glasses perched on his nose, he looked every bit the cultured gentleman, yet his physique screamed of a suit-clad ruffian.

"Hold on for a sec, I need to change," he told her, placing Dorothy on the bed before standing up to change out of his business attire.

As he had just come from a meeting, Everett had been wearing a suit and tie. Now that the meeting was over, he could slip out of those symbols of corporate warfare.

As Dorothy watched him change, she was unsure where to rest her gaze.

It felt rude for a lady to stare so intently at a man undressing. But looking away felt negligent; she was afraid of he might accidentally touch his wound in the process.

Thankfully, he was quick. His long, articulate fingers buttoned up the silk pajama shirt one by one as he asked, "Are you still in pain?"

"Huh?"

"Your abdomen, does it still hurt?"

Realization dawned on her, and she buried herself deeper into the covers with burning cheeks.

"I don't want to talk to you anymore!"

Everett peeled back the corner of the blanket and slid in beside her, enveloping her entirely in his embrace.

"I didn't push too hard today," he murmured, his breath warm against the faint mole on her ear, his voice growing huskier.

"What if I go all the way next time?" he teased.

"Don't even think about it!"

...

Karen hailed a cab back home, which caught her parents by surprise.

After all, she had just texted them that she wouldn't be back for a while.

"What's wrong, honey?" Karen's mom, Serena, got up from the couch, following her daughter into her room, concerned by her pallor.

"It's nothing." Karen was just feeling irked by thoughts of Jeffrey, her mind a tangled mess.

"That's good. If there's anything bothering you, you talk to us, okay?" Serena's voice was firm. "Your dad was so worried. He had just called your brother, who was surprised you hadn't come home after he dropped you off. You should have seen your dad's face, which was scared stiff. He was thinking you might've run into some trouble!"

Karen felt a mix of exasperation and warmth and stood up to hug her mom.

"Mom, I'm an adult. Do you really think I'd be kidnapped?"

"Of course we worry. You'll always be our little girl," Serena said as she patted her back. "Even when you're married with kids of your own, you'll still be our baby."

Karen chuckled and snuggled closer, "I'm not planning on getting married. I'm happy as I am."

"Nonsense! What about when your father and I are old? Who will take care of you then?"

"If I get married, that doesn't guarantee he'll take care of me!" The image of Jeffrey popped into her mind, and she grimaced. "What if he turns out to be a no-good guy, always out partying and cheating? I'd be better off single!"

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"You can't think this way! My daughter is a bright spark, a real beauty—you'll snag a great husband, no doubt about it," Serena chuckled, pausing for a moment with a twinkle in her eye. "Speaking of which... you know, your father's colleague's kid just got back from abroad. Caught a glimpse of his photo the other day, and boy, he's a catch! Handsome and full of life. Wanna take a peek?"

Karen eyed her mother skeptically, "That's your grand scheme, isn't it, Mom? You're setting me up on a blind date?"

Serena waved her hand dismissively, "No pressure, darling! It's all up to you. If you're not into it, forget it. But there's no harm in looking, right? If there's no spark, you just walk away. But if there is, why not give it a shot?"

"Handsome, you say?"

"Mhm."

Karen pondered for a moment. "Got a picture?" she asked.

Serena sprang to her feet, "I sure do! I'll grab it from your dad. Just take a quick look!"

Karen flashed an 'OK' sign. "Sure, let's see it."

She thought about how long it had been since her last date and shuddered at the thought of becoming an old maid. If there was a chance to meet someone decent, someone with a kind heart and good temperament, she was open to giving it a try.

It wasn't like her friend Dorothy, who had been carrying a torch for Everett all these years. Dorothy wasn't looking because she hadn't let go.

But Karen was different. She wasn't pining for anyone, nor was in love. She was just too lazy to mingle, plus babysitting and work kept her busy enough without throwing men into the mix.

Came to think of it, she had Jeffrey to thank for this sudden openness to dating. Before, Karen wasn't sure what she wanted in a man, and she couldn't say for certain even for now. But she knew one thing—she didn't want anyone like Jeffrey!

The thought of him squatting outside all night over their last squabble was ridiculous.

Maybe Jeffrey was short-staffed?

...

Little did Jeffrey know Karen was being lined up for a blind date. He was still wrestling with the idea of just showing up at her doorstep.

If she didn't come down soon, how much longer would he have to wait?

But then again, if he would be showing up unannounced and facing her parents, he wasn't quite sure what he'd say.

'Hi, I'm the guy who's been seeing your daughter but never made it official'?

The mere thought made Jeffrey wince. He was anticipating the upcoming “mix doubles”, which would also be a harsh one.

After much deliberation, Jeffrey dialed the manager of the Prosperity Consortium.

The voice on the other end was as deferential as ever.

"Mr. Turner! What can I do for you?"

"Yeah, I want you to pick up some gifts and pay a visit to Karen's folks as a gesture of goodwill."

The manager was confused, "Mr. Turner, Miss Karen hasn't been with the Prosperity Consortium for years!"

"Just do it, will you? Stop fussing. Say the Consortium values her past work and is interested in bringing her back. Do I need to spell it out for you?"

"Of course, of course, my mistake..."

"Remember, you're to invite Karen out for a one-on-one. Get her to come downstairs, say there's a company matter that needs discussing privately."

The manager quickly agreed, "Got it! And then where do I take her? To you?"

"I'm right outside her parents' place. Just get her down here, and I'll take it from there."

"Understood! I'm on it!"

"Make it quick."

Jeffrey hung up and cast a glance at the entrance to Karen's parents' building.

He wondered if she'd suspect anything.

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Jeffery pulled his coat tighter around him, intending to lean against his car for a quick snooze – he was just that tired.

Suddenly, he sat bolt upright, fumbling for his cell phone to call his assistant.

"Drive your car over here!"

"Huh?"

"Bring your car, and then take mine to my garage."

His own car was way too conspicuous in this neighborhood. Even Karen, as clueless as she was, would figure out what was going on. But any of his cars would stick out like a sore thumb here!

It was only his assistant's ride that would blend in, more or less. It wouldn't seem entirely out of place in this neighborhood.

"Oh my, Karen, you are the only one I go to such lengths for!"

Jeffery snorted, started the engine, and drove his car to the entrance of the neighborhood to wait for his assistant. He didn't want Karen catching wind of anything just yet.

...

Sleeping next to Everett, Dorothy always found a deep, restful slumber.

She woke up the next day feeling refreshed and rejuvenated.

She had to be up before Quincy arrived to change her dressing, get herself tidied up, and wait for the doctor.

Knock knock.

Quincy was at the door right on time.

Dorothy wiped her hands and went to open it.

"Good morning, Ms. Sanchez!" Quincy, breaking from her usual attire, wasn't in her white lab coat but a pristine white sundress, looking ethereal like a fairy.

She entered, holding the medical supplies and began to speak as she walked, "I have some personal commitments today, so after I've changed his dressing, I won't be at the hospital. I'll be back tomorrow! If anything comes up, just call me. I've briefed the other doctors at the hospital about your case."

Dorothy nodded, "Okay."

It was clear Quincy had plans, otherwise she wouldn't have shed her trademark lab coat.

Making small talk, Dorothy asked, "Dr. Quincy, what's the special occasion? You look stunning."

"My parents insisted I attend an event. They made it sound quite imperative," Quincy replied, carefully changing Everett's bandages. "It might be a setup, a blind date I guess."

"You are attending a blind date?"

"I'm not sure, but that's my hunch!" Quincy chuckled, "They've been nudging me about it, but I haven't been keen on dating. I've put it off for so long; I think they're getting anxious. I really just need to show face."

Dorothy nodded, "Well, I hope you find someone truly compatible, Dr. Quincy."

She waved it off, "Unlikely. It's just a formality."

Dorothy laughed, finding Quincy's optimism and simplicity charming. Surely, she mused, the universe would match her with a worthy partner.

After Quincy left, Dorothy approached Everett's bedside and waved her hand in front of his face, "Did you see Dr. Quincy's outfit? It was quite lovely."

Everett paused his work to look at her, "What outfit?"

"You didn't see?"

"I was reviewing a contract." Everett turned his laptop towards her.

Dorothy pouted, "You missed out. Dr. Quincy looked especially beautiful today."

Everett was about to finish with the contract, but something in her tone caught his attention.

He raised an eyebrow and pulled her closer, "You don't think there's something going on between me and Dr. Quincy, do you?"

"No, I don't."

"Dorothy, stop jumping to conclusions. It can only be you."

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It simply couldn't be anyone else.

"Why?"

Dorothy gazed into his eyes, which were deep and clear and untainted by any falsehood. She knew he hadn't lied.

But why?

What about her was worth this?

"There's no why. I don't have an answer as well."

If he did, he wouldn't have been stuck and standing still for years.

Dorothy could feel that Everett wanted to throw the question back at her. But he didn't dare.

He was scared the answer wouldn't be the one he wanted.

The topic was too heavy; Dorothy didn't want to delve any deeper.

She looked down to find her phone and noticed an unread WhatsApp message.

It was from Karen.

Upon opening it, a photo of a guy popped up.

Everett, sitting beside her, caught a glimpse and immediately furrowed his brows, "What's she doing, sending you pictures of guys?"

Dorothy sighed, showing him the message thread on her phone, "Don't jump to conclusions, okay? She's asking if I think he's handsome. She's planning to go on a blind date with him."

"She's going on a blind date?"

"Yeah." Dorothy nodded, taking a closer look at the guy in the photo.

He was quite the looker, seemingly around Karen's age. Not drop-dead gorgeous, but definitely above average.

He had to be Karen's type, or else she wouldn't have sent it.

Just as Dorothy was about to zoom in on the guy's photo to get a better look at his features, her phone was snatched away!

Lifting her eyes, she met Everett's displeased gaze.

"How long are you going to look at that?"

"You're not getting mad about this, are you?"

"What's there to look at? He's Karen's date, not yours." Everett turned off her phone and set it aside, "You're never going to have a chance to go on a blind date in this lifetime."

Dorothy laughed helplessly and took the initiative to link her arm through Everett's and to give it a gentle shake, "I promise you I will never go on a blind date in my life, okay? Stop being jealous, it doesn't suit the persona of a CEO like you."

"Even a CEO has feelings. Can't I be uncomfortable seeing you gawk at another man's photo?"

"No, no, no, you can! I won't look anymore, I'll delete it." Dorothy promptly deleted the photo without hesitation, "I just wanted to look out for Karen. Over the years, she's been held back from dating

and marriage since I drag her down. Now that she wants to go on a blind date, I can't just say nothing."

If it weren't for her always asking Karen to look after Abigail, she might have already found a partner by now!

Dorothy always felt that the lack of progress in Karen's relationships was her fault.

Seeing her delete the photo, Everett let it be.

"So, if things go well for Karen, she might be getting married?"

"Who knows?" Dorothy typed away and spoke to him simultaneously, "You know her personality; she may have a shotgun wedding."

Everett's expression darkened slightly, and after a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Do you think there's a chance between Karen and Jeffrey?"

Dorothy stopped typing and looked up, "You know what kind of person Jeffrey is better than I do, right?"

Everett didn't have a single word to say.

"Can he really settle down with Karen? I can tell he's interested in her, or he wouldn't keep bringing her up or have followed her back from abroad. But who can tell how long will his interest last?"

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Everett couldn't promise anything with certainty, especially when it came to Jeffrey.

Jeffrey was known to be a playboy, who never took things seriously, for all these years. Everett was genuinely surprised at the amount of attention he was paying to Karen.

It seemed like Karen was the only thing that could make Jeffrey hit the pause button on his usual antics and show some real interest.

But as for how long that interest might last, well, that was anyone's guess.

Jeffrey himself was still a bit of a kid at heart, and Karen was no different. Even if they did get together, there was no guarantee it would last all the way to an "I do."

Dorothy sent Karen a message on WhatsApp.

[Sounds like he might be just your type. Give it a shot. Whether it works out or not, you won't know until you spend some time together. Can't just fall for a pretty face, right?]

Karen replied with a bashful emoji.

[Guess who might have a boyfriend soon! LOL! My dad finally did something right and set me up with a real catch! Tall, handsome, just got back from starting a business abroad. He's got a house and a car in Eldorria City and earns over one hundred thousand dollars a year.]

[That does sound impressive.]

Karen bombarded her with a slew of 'LOL's. [The best part about blind dates set up by your parents is everything's out in the open! They've even checked out his house, car, and salary for me! But... I'm kinda worried he might not be into me.]

Her job wasn't exactly stable, and it wasn't high-paying either. She was an only child, so eventually, her parents' money would be hers, but it wasn't a lot.

And then there was her looks—pretty average.

Karen sent a sighing emoji, [Dorothy, if only I had your face, I'd totally sweep him off his feet!]

Dorothy glanced at Everett reflexively when she read that.

Thank goodness he didn't see that message. He'd have gotten jealous for sure.

He had been a bit too possessive lately...

[I think you're great as you are, no need to put yourself down.]

[OK! I'm gonna get ready then. Take a shower and maybe hit the mall for a new outfit. Dad's in a hurry and wants me to meet the guy tonight. Everything's all set so I better spruce myself up.]

[Go for it! I hope you find happiness.]

Dorothy put down her phone with a sigh of relief.

Even if she didn't know whether it would work out or not, at least Karen was taking a step forward. That helped ease some of the guilt Dorothy felt.

...

The manager from the Prosperity Consortium arrived lugging several boxes of various sizes.

Mr. Turner had given the orders, and he couldn't afford not to handle this task well!

Standing at the doorstep of Karen's parents' house, the manager knocked. It was Karen's dad, Derek Miller, who answered, "Yes? Who are you?"

"Hello, sir. Is this Karen's place?"

"Yes, it is."

"I'm the manager from the Prosperity Consortium. I used to be Karen's boss! I'm here because we'd really like to have a word with Ms. Miller. We're hoping she'll consider rejoining our team."

Derek eyed the armload of gifts and therefore felt his sincerity. He knew his daughter had indeed worked there before.

But...

"My daughter isn't home right now."

The manager's heart sank. He was worried about how he'd explain this to the big shot waiting in the car so he asked, "Could you tell me when she might be back?"

Derek's face was lit with a happy glow. He was wearing an ever-lasting smile, "Hard to say. She's out shopping with her mother. They're preparing for a blind date tonight. You know how it is with girls; they have to dress up before they head out. They'll probably be out late shopping. Maybe you could come back tomorrow?"

The manager was taken aback.

With that, Derek declined the gifts, simply suggesting they try again the next day.

The manager exited the building, and immediately Jeffrey, who had been waiting in the car, burst out and strode rapidly towards the door.

"Where's Karen?" he asked.

"Her dad says she... she's out on a blind date, not at home."

“What? Say that again!”

Jeffrey’s voice boomed through the room, startling the manager to the point where he nearly thought his eardrums would burst.

“He... he just told me that.”

The manager was on the verge of tears. It wasn’t his choice to set up this blind date!

Jeffrey clenched his fists, storming toward Karen’s parents’ apartment door.

He hammered on the door, and there was Karen’s dad again.

Seeing another unfamiliar face on his doorstep, her dad looked cautious; he was sizing up the tall young man before him.

“Can I help you?”

“Karen’s going on a blind date?” Jeffrey had lost all sense of rationale, not caring about the harshness of his tone.

Derek scrutinized him for a few seconds and looked defensive, “What’s it to you?”

“Give me her cell number.”

“Son, if don’t even have Karen’s number, that must mean she doesn’t want to give it to you. I don’t know what you are to her, but my daughter isn’t home. If you have business, wait for her to come back.”

Jeffrey tried to speak again, but Derek had already shut the door.

He considered knocking again but knew it was pointless. Besides, Karen wasn’t there.

Jeffrey descended the steps, finding the manager still trembling in anticipation.

“Mr. Turner...”

“Just go, it’s none of your business anymore.”

Frustrated, Jeffrey slumped into his car, yanking a cigarette from the pack to light up.

“Nice move, Karen! Really smooth!”

She actually went on a blind date!

She actually went on a damn blind date!

Jeffrey punched the steering wheel, his teeth grinding audibly.

But that wasn’t the point. She was out there meeting other guys, and he was stuck waiting outside her parents’ place with no other way to reach her!

How could he not be livid?

As he finished his cigarette, Jeffrey tossed the butt out the window, revving up the engine to leave.

He got the message loud and clear—Karen never intended anything serious with him and never felt a hint of affection. He was just shamelessly clinging on.

He would be a fool if he couldn’t see that.

Jeffrey was someone with a reputation in Eldorria City, and here he was, letting someone trample on his pride. The thought itself was laughable.

He floored the accelerator, and the car shot off like an arrow.

At the turn of the complex, he glanced in the rear-view mirror one last time.

That figure was definitely Karen.

She carried two large shopping bags, donned a new outfit, and was laughing joyfully with someone who looked like her mom.

Jeffrey then slammed on the brakes again, which was done in an uncharacteristic and sneaky manner.

“Mom, I think this pink dress looks great on me, doesn’t it?”

“Gorgeous! My daughter looks beautiful in anything.” Karen’s mom, Serena, wore an indulgent smile.

How could she not dote on her only daughter, who was always the apple of her eye?

“Alright, I’ll wear this tonight!” Karen knew her own strengths; her fair skin made the pink dress even more flattering.

Someone said a fair complexion could tone down many flaws.

Just as Karen was about to head upstairs with her mom, she heard someone call her name from behind.

Her shoulders tensed.

The last thing she wanted was to turn around.

“Someone seems to be calling you,” Serena whispered softly.

“Yeah, Mom, you go ahead. A friend of mine needs a word.”

Karen watched her mother take the bags upstairs and disappear before she finally turned around.

“Jeffrey, what on earth do you want?”

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Jeffrey clutched a pack of cigarettes in his hand, but hadn't lit a single one. He just fiddled with his lighter, occasionally flicking it on, watching the flame spark to life before snapping it shut, all while keeping his eyes on her.

No next move, no words spoken.

Karen hadn't expected him to actually show up in front of her parents, so she was really pissed.

The last thing she wanted was for her folks to catch wind of her reckless escapades! How could she possibly explain to them that their darling daughter had been living it up and even boldly hitting on a guy, asking him outright if he was up for a one-night stand?

Click.

The lighter sparked again, the flame appearing and then being extinguished.

Jeffrey gritted his teeth, trying to rein in his temper before finally speaking up, "Your dad mentioned you're going on a blind date. Is that true?"

"It's true," Karen responded without little intention of concealment.

There was no need to hide anything from Jeffrey.

"And what about me?" Jeffrey lowered his gaze as he reached for a cigarette, and Karen couldn't help but notice his defined hands seemed to tremble ever so slightly.

"What are you talking about?"

"You admitted to my mom that you're my girlfriend, and now you're off to meet another guy."

Jeffrey was struggling to keep his cool, not wanting to start a row with Karen the moment he arrived.

The truth was, he hadn't rested much over the past few days and was running on fumes.

"That was you talking! With the way things were going, how could I not play along?" Karen kept her distance. Her voice was barely above a whisper, wary of her parents overhearing from upstairs, "Did you drive here?"

"Yeah."

"Let's talk in your car." Karen glanced at the clock; she had a few hours before the dinner party and needed to sort out this mess quickly.

Jeffrey watched her walk past him. She was dressed in a new outfit, with a touch of makeup and a spritz of perfume, looking different from the Karen he was used to.

No need to guess; she was all dolled up for the blind date.

She sure seemed eager about this setup.

Stuffing his cigarette pack and lighter into his pocket, Jeffrey strode after Karen and caught up.

"Where's your car?"

"Right here." Jeffrey unlocked the sleek black Audi A7 parked nearby.

Karen's brow furrowed slightly.

No wonder she hadn't noticed him arrive. That's all because he'd switched cars.

To avoid any misinterpretation, Karen intentionally sat in the back seat. But as she looked up, Jeffrey opened the rear door and slid in beside her.

Leaving the car now would seem too deliberate.

"You mentioned before about three strikes and we're done. I can't do that anymore; I don't want to sleep with you anymore," Karen spoke first, her voice trailed off with a hint of guilt for renegeing on her promise.

"I noticed."

"So, Mr. Turner, please go find someone else to entertain you and leave me be. Look at me, I'm average in looks and figure, and my family's nothing compared to yours. How can I believe you when you say you want me as your girlfriend?" Karen decided to lay it all out, "I'm not a kid anymore. I date with marriage in mind, so we're not on the same page. Even if I said yes, it would just mean a few more nights together, that's all."

Jeffrey's eyes fixed on her, his tongue pressing against his cheek, "So how do you know the guy is going to marry you?"

"He probably will. I haven't met him yet, but it's a setup by my parents. So he's likely on the same page."

"And you're sure he's not just in it for fun, ready to bail once he's had his fill?"

"I don't know," Karen admitted. "But at least we're well-matched socially."

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The absurdity of matching social status!

Was it a crime to come from a good home now?

"Whatever he can offer you, I can match it," Jeffrey's voice was a low rumble that filled with a tired rage that seemed to have no outlet, "Stop going on these blind dates."

"He can marry me. Can you?"

Jeffrey was about to retort when Karen cut him off, "Don't tell me you can! Because I simply don't believe it! Jeffrey, how long have we even known each other? Just that one night—yes, we got intimate—but every other time, we've been at each other's throats! Now you come here saying you want to be my boyfriend and even marry me? How ludicrous is that? Listen to yourself. Do you believe your own words?"

That was true.

Even Jeffrey found it hard to believe.

What was he being so stubborn for? There were plenty of fish in the sea.

"You don't believe I'd marry you, do you?" Jeffrey made up his mind, "Fine, tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll go to city hall and make it official! We can deal with the details later. Will that make you believe?"

Looking up, he was met with Karen's shocked face.

"What are you even saying? Did you hear yourself?"

"I know what I'm saying, and I'm not out of my mind." Jeffrey ran his fingers through his hair, his brows furrowed persistently, "Get your ID, I'll pick you up tomorrow. What's the big deal about marriage? If I marry you, that's gonna be more reliable than your current date prospect, right?"

"Hold on, just hold on," Karen waved her hands.

She was flustered! The conversation with Jeffrey had taken such a bizarre turn!

This wasn't simply about rushing to the city hall, was it?

"Jeffrey, I never planned on marrying you!"

Jeffrey stayed silent.

"I might not be a saint or have any hang-ups about having sex, but you've been with too many women, and you're too much of a playboy. I don't believe you're ready to settle

down for now. Maybe you can behave for a day or a month, but what about in the long run?" Karen didn't want to anchor her life to a man teeming with instability.

What would she do if, after marriage and kids, he returned to his partying ways, thus leaving her alone to cry with the baby in her arms?

Fighting against it and getting a divorce would be such a hardship. The Turners could crush her average family in an instant, leaving her with nowhere to turn with her grievances!

"I admit I've lived it up, and I've said that if you become my girlfriend, I'll change. Give me a chance, yeah?" Jeffrey knew he couldn't deny his past or make excuses, but he couldn't travel back in time to change it either.

"No chance, I can't give you one," Karen was resolute, "Mr. Turner, we're just not a good fit! Maybe you should play around a few more years, or find someone who matches your family's status. I can't

afford to play your games."

With that, she moved to get out of the car.

Jeffrey's hand shot out, pulling her back into a firm embrace.

Their eyes locked, his features so handsome it was hard for Karen to utter another harsh word.

"I'm not playing games, really."

"I don't believe I have the qualities or the charm to make you stay devoted to me. Do you understand that?"

Despite Karen's seemingly carefree attitude, she was acutely aware of her own situation.

She didn't aspire to climb social ladders or invite trouble into her life. Her life plan was pretty clear.

Hearing her, Jeffrey's lips twitched, his gaze drifting to the new pink dress she wore, which he found so distasteful he wanted to rip it to shreds.

"So, you really have to go on this date today?"

"Yes."

Karen didn't think twice before nodding.

This was a blind date set up by her parents. Even if she wasn't interested, she felt obligated to show up.

Jeffrey had pinned her to the back seat of his car in the very next second.

Instinctively, Karen tried to struggle, but he easily subdued her with one hand and pinned her arms high above her head.

"What the hell are you doing, Jeffrey?!"

"You promised me three times, Karen. I'm cashing in now!"

Panic surged through her and she attempted to kick him away, only to find her ankles caught and lifted to his waist. "I changed my mind!" she exclaimed.

"I didn't agree to that."

Before Karen could argue further, Jeffrey lost his patience to listen.

He had provided solutions, and she still disagreed. So be it. He'd resolve with his action.

The pink dress she wore was an eyesore to him. In a fit of rage, Jeffrey tore it apart.

"Jeffrey, are you out of your mind? Let go of me!"

"I gave you a chance."

A fair chance to talk it out.

God knew how he had to grit his teeth and clench his fists just to stay calm during their conversation; he was trying to understand her, to avoid an argument right off the bat.

But if she still refused, he'd have to resort to his own methods.

Pinned beneath him, Karen felt a wave of fear and shame crash over her. She was terrified of this side of Jeffrey...

"Let me go!"

"I won't!"

As he spoke, his body pressed down with all his might.

"Ah!"

Karen's face went ghostly white with pain, and after her initial cry, she couldn't make another sound.

The intense ripping sensation felt like a knife stabbing into her.

The pain was unbearable for Karen, and Jeffrey was hardly enjoying himself either.

With no foreplay, this act was pure mutual torment.

Yet he needed this release in order to keep himself from going mad.

The pain brought a sobering clarity to Karen, solidifying her resolve to have nothing to do with Jeffrey ever again.

She tried to relax, to ease the excruciating pain...

The two stubborn people refused to speak. After what seemed like an eternity, Karen felt him change rhythm and immediately pinched his arm, "You're not wearing anything! Jeffrey!"

He raised his bloodshot eyes. Without a single word, his lips pressed in a tight line as he continued.

When Karen thought she might pass out from the motion, it was finally over.

His grip on her wrists loosened.

"Did you... did you finish inside?"

"Still going on that date?" His first words were as defiant as ever.

Karen didn't want to answer and instead pushed against him.

But Jeffrey was immovable like a rock.

"You're sick! Jeffrey, do you even know what respect is? Great, you had your fun, but if I get pregnant, I'm the one who suffers!"

Her emotions teetered on the edge; her voice broke, and tears streamed down her face.

"If there's a kid, the Turner family will own up to it."

"And you think I want to marry you? I'm telling you, even if I never have kids, I will not bear yours! If I get pregnant, I'll end it! Uh..."

Her words were cut short as her lips were suddenly seized in a silencing kiss.

Her remaining protests were muffled.

"Mmm! Jeffrey... Mmm!"

"I told you, after three times, we're done. This is just the first!"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 571 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 571

Today, if Karen could actually make it to that blind date, he'd eat his own hat.

But it didn't cost three times to exhaust a woman. By round two, Karen was already speechless. Her whole body was drenched as if she'd been pulled from a stormy sea.

"I really... can't do this..." she rasped. Her voice was hoarse and breathless, her fiery spirit worn down to a mere whisper of surrender.

Jeffrey, too, was feeling the burn of exhaustion that came from days without proper rest. But that didn't stop him from teaching the woman beneath him a lesson.

"Still thinking about that blind date?" he taunted.

"If I say I won't go, will you stop?" Karen wheezed, her throat as dry as a bone.

He raised an eyebrow, "Maybe."

"Fine, I won't go. Now let me go," Karen managed to say, her voice barely above a whisper.

Satisfied with her capitulation, Jeffrey gave one final push, bringing their second round to a swift conclusion.

He withdrew, standing to fetch a bottle of water from the trunk of the car for Karen, who was too exhausted to even reach for it without trembling.

Feeling magnanimous, Jeffrey unscrewed the cap and held the bottle to her lips, "I'll feed you."

Karen was too spent to argue so she obeyed.

Her phone chose that moment to ring—it was Derek.

It was time for the blind date. He was calling to hustle her back home.

Jeffrey watched her with an intensity that made her skin crawl.

"Don't you dare speak," Karen whispered threateningly.

"And you can't go on that date."

"Look at me! I'm a hot mess. I couldn't go on a blind date if I wanted to!"

Her clothes were a disaster, her hair a wild tangle, and her new outfit was torn beyond repair.

Karen glared at him and cleared her throat with a soft cough. But she was still hard to mask the roughness in her voice as she spoke.

"Dad..."

"Karen, where are you? It's time. Will you come straight there, or do you want to come home and we'll go together?"

Karen licked her parched lips, hesitating, "Dad, I might not make it today."

"What? Why?" Derek sounded puzzled.

"I've got... a friend who needs me. It'll take some time to sort out. I probably won't be able to make it. Please apologize to your friends for me, and maybe another day."

Jeffrey's warning look cut her off mid-sentence.

Quickly changing tack, she laughed lightly, "Let's have dinner together another time. You and Mom can invite them out again."

"You can't get cold feet, kiddo," Derek sounded a bit distressed, then something seemed to click. "Wait, your friend? The guy who came by today? He came looking for you, but you weren't home."

"He did?" Karen glanced at Jeffrey.

He shrugged slightly with a hint of guilt in his smirk.

"Yeah! He asked for your number, but I didn't give it to him. Are you with him now?" Derek's concern escalated. "Is he bothering you? Karen, if you're in trouble, just tell me. I'll come and get you!"

"No, no, it's nothing like that... I'm with him, just catching up over dinner. He's just back from abroad and it's been ages. It wouldn't be polite to bail midway. Dad, you and Mom go ahead, I'm eating. Gotta hang up now."

Without waiting for a reply, she quickly ended the call.

Jeffrey chuckled, "Me? A 'just friend'?"

The scent of their recent encounter still lingered in the car, and Karen had already distanced herself from him.

"I've turned down the blind date. Can you please go now?"

Chapter 572

"Where do you think you're going looking like that?"

With a glance, Jeffrey motioned for her to check herself out.

Her lips were swollen, her cheeks flushed, her hair a mess, and her makeup smeared. Drenched in sweat, her clothes were as disheveled as if she'd been in a brawl. That was not a look for her to go home?

Her parents would probably call the cops on seeing this.

"Mind your own business."

"And if not me, who's going to? Who do you want to take care of you?"

Jeffrey's tone sank as if coaxing and compromising were his last resort, "Let's head to my place first so you can clean up, shower, and change."

Karen immediately rejected the idea, "I'm not going to your place."

That would be jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

"My folks definitely won't be there this time; I will message them in advance. You need to pull yourself together at least. You can't go home looking like this even if you ditch the blind date."

Karen had planned to go to Kenneth's place originally, while Jeffrey had a point.

Kenneth would worry and pester her with questions on seeing her in this mess. And she had no idea what to tell him.

"Just come back with me to change, and I'll treat you to some good grub. How about it, Karen?"

"You don't have any clothes for me!"

"We'll shop! It's on me no matter how many you want and how much you will spend." Anything to get her out of that dreadful pink outfit!

It was bad luck just to look at it!

"Fine, let's go." She didn't have any better options for now.

"To my place?" Jeffrey's handsome face lit up with a smirk.

Karen turned her face away, ignoring him.

Jeffrey squinted his eyes and chuckled, jauntily grabbing the car keys to lead the way.

Her phone pinged several times with WhatsApp notifications.

Karen glanced down to see messages from Dorothy.

[Did you go? How did it go?] This content provided by N(o)velDrama.[Org.
[I'm waiting for your update! Did you like the guy you met?]

[Looks like you're quite into him; too busy to check your phone, huh?]

Karen's lips puckered in irritation. Her self-pity only grew as she dwelt on it until she burst into tears.

It startled Jeffrey, who was driving, causing him to slam the brakes and pull over.

"What's wrong?"

"It hurts... Jeffrey, you jerk! It hurts like hell, and you don't even care!"

Jeffrey looked at her anxiously, "Um, where does it hurt? Should I take you to the hospital?"

"Back off! Where do you think it hurts? You... you asshole!"

Karen cried inconsolably, wiping away tears over and over.

Jeffrey watched helplessly, but he was clueless about comforting girls. Therefore, he could only stand there and hand her tissues, "Please stop crying, okay?"

"Jeffrey, you jerk!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm a jerk. You can yell at me, but just stop crying!"

Karen paused. She looked up at his confused and anxious face and couldn't hold back a laugh.

She was actually laughing out of sheer frustration!

"Are you out of your mind? Why on earth did you crash my blind date, Jeffrey? You don't happen to have a thing for me, do you?"

Jeffrey was about to burst into laughter himself.

"If I'm not into you, then why would I get out of my way to disrupt your blind date and be cursed out? When have I ever done anything like this in my life?"

"How would I know if this isn't just your usual pick-up strategy?"

"Do I look like I need to make a move to pick someone up?"

Karen eyed him, her mouth twisted in skepticism, "How should I know? That's your area of expertise, not mine."

"I promise you, from now on, I won't be chasing anyone else. Just you!"

"Get lost!"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 573 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 573

Karen sent Dorothy a brief text, saying she didn't go on the blind date, then slumped into the backseat of the car and fell asleep.

By the time they pulled up to Jeffrey's place, she was sleeping so tight with tear streaks marking her cheeks and her silky hair spilling over the seat.

Jeffrey had a soft spot for her hair; it was always so smooth to the touch.

He drove the car into the garage, thinking initially to have his secretary take care of it, but then figured he'd just give the guy some extra cash tomorrow to go get a new one.

After parking, Jeffrey leaned over and gently lifted Karen, carrying her into the bedroom.

She was so thoroughly exhausted that even all this commotion didn't stir her.

Jeffrey washed a towel and wiped her face clean. He felt a twinge of guilt for what had happened in the car.

This was the first time that he, a young master, took care of a woman like this!

After cleaning her up, he changed her out of her dirty clothes and into one of his own nightshirts. This content provided by N(o)velDrama].[Org.

Karen mumbled something in her sleep as she turned over, then drifted off again.

Jeffrey couldn't help but smirk while watching her sleep so peacefully. He was pretty beat himself, so he decided to slip under the covers and pull her into his arms.

Yeah, that felt right.

After all the trouble he'd gone through, this outcome was worth it.

...

Dorothy was surprised, to say the least.

Karen had seemed so pleased with the guy she was set up with, yet she claimed she hadn't gone.

Dorothy eyed Everett, who was reviewing contracts, and approached once she was sure he wasn't on a video call.

"Did you tell Jeffrey about Karen's date?" she asked.

"No." Everett shifted his gaze from the screen to her face. "Why?"

"She said she didn't go, and now she's not answering my texts. I'm wondering if Jeffrey meddled!"

Dorothy had a hunch that Jeffrey had ulterior motives when it came to Karen.

Everett pulled her slender waist closer and seated her on his lap, "Karen knows what she's doing. She's a grown woman; you don't need to worry."

"I wouldn't worry if it were anyone else. Love comes and goes, and at worst, she'd just meet the wrong guy. But Jeffrey going after Karen? I don't have a good feeling about it." Dorothy found Jeffrey's charm to be a bit too roguish for her liking.

Handsome, sure, but a notorious flirt.

How could she not worry about her friend potentially falling for a playboy?

Especially when Jeffrey's reputation was so transparent!

"I have never seen that brat be serious about anyone. But maybe he's ready to settle down considering the way he's going after Karen."

Everett knew the feeling well.

Sometimes it only takes a few words, a minute, or even a look to know you've found the one.

Even a playboy like Jeffrey would eventually meet someone who could tame him, someone he truly cared for.

"Pfft! In the end, it's up to Karen. She told me she doesn't actually like Jeffrey, just thought he was good-looking and wanted to... have a physical fling with him."

Dorothy was shy about using more adult language, so she danced around until she landed on those words.

Everett chuckled, the corner of his mouth curving up, "So when you texted me from the hotel and didn't push me away when I showed up, you just wanted to... connect 'physically' with me?"

Caught in his words, Dorothy blushed awkwardly.

Everett nipped at her ear playfully, "Don't you dare have those thoughts about anyone else!"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 574 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 574

Dorothy flinched, ducking away from his imposing figure, "You know, Mr. Lopez, you've been throwing around 'can't' and 'don't' a lot lately!"

Everything seemed to be off-limits now!

He was setting rules at every turn and she didn't remember him being this domineering before.

"It's because you've been flirting left and right," he accused.

"I have not!" she retorted without missing a beat.

Everett raised an eyebrow. "Then what about Kenneth?" he asked.

Silence.

"And what about Lane?"

More silence.

"While we're on the subject, I still need to settle the score with him."

Simply tearing down The Prosperity Consortium wasn't nearly enough.

Dorothy glanced at him, neither pleading for Lane nor intending to.

If you did the crime, you'd do the time!

Lane put Abigail in danger, so how could Everett, her father, let it slide?

"Have you decided when you're going back to pick up the kids?" Dorothy didn't have a shred of sympathy for Lane, but Kenneth was a different story.

She hadn't even broached the subject of taking the kids away with Kenneth, mainly because she had no idea how to bring it up.

It was just too cruel.

"How about next week?" Everett didn't give her a chance to back out. The sooner he picked up the kids, the better for him. He was eager to see his kids.

No man could stand having his kids cared for by a rival.

"Your health..."

"I'm fine." If he didn't get his children back soon, that would be the least of his worries.

Hearing his non-negotiable tone, Dorothy sighed in resignation, "Then why you still asked? I bet you've already had Kevin book the tickets."

"It's just Kevin being efficient."

She knew it!

...

Karen was exhausted.

She'd slept so soundly that her parents, along with Kenneth, had reported her missing at the police station.

When she opened her eyes, the unfamiliar ceiling and room left her bewildered for a moment before she abruptly turned to see the familiar man behind her.

"What are you doing here?!" Karen's voice startled Jeffrey from his deep slumber.

He was bare-chested and rubbing his sleepy eyes. The silk sheets were loosely draped around his waist, exposing his toned torso down to his. Fortunately, he was wearing pajama bottoms.

"What time is it?" Jeffrey yawned, rubbing his tousled hair, and sat up looking confused like a teenager who still wanted to stay in bed.

Reminded by his question, Karen quickly checked her phone.

Nearly a hundred missed calls!

She scrambled for the covers and headed to the window to return the calls, weaving a tapestry of lies that almost depleted her mental reserves. She'd never had to make up so many lies on the fly before.

No matter how her parents or Kenneth grilled her, Karen stuck to her story that Jeffrey was just a friend, that she had too much to drink last night, blacked out, and ended up sleeping at the hotel.

She let out a sigh of relief after she managed to stave them off for now. And when she looked up, she caught Jeffrey giving her a look of reproach.

"If we're just friends, how many 'just friends' do you have?" he questioned.

Karen couldn't be bothered with him and stood up to freshen up.

Jeffrey, persistent as ever, grabbed her wrist, "You haven't made it clear. What are you up to now?"

"What haven't I made clear? Jeffrey, don't tell me you think that I've agreed to be your girlfriend just because I didn't go on that blind date yesterday?"

"You haven't?"

"Of course not!" Karen glared at him. "You owe me for the ripped clothes, and while you're at it, go pick up some medicine."

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 575 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 575

She absolutely did not want to be carrying Jeffrey's baby!

After a whole night, Karen wondered if emergency contraception was still an option.

Watching the man behind her showing no signs of action, she couldn't contain her urgency, "What are you spacing out for, Jeffrey?"

"So you're just itching to get rid of me that quickly?"

"Can't you understand a word I'm saying?" Karen was on edge, her patience thinning. She locked eyes with Jeffrey, pleading, "Can we just get the pill first, please? I'm begging you. We can sort out everything else after I've taken it! I'm not in my safe period!"

She never thought Jeffrey would force himself on her. And to make matters worse, he finished inside.

Karen's panic was palpable.

If she had anything to wear, she would've dashed out to get the pill herself long ago!

Jeffrey seemed like he wanted to say more, but he ended up silently grabbing a set of casual black clothes from the closet and hurried out the door.

After freshening up, Karen, still in Jeffrey's pajamas, waited anxiously in the room.

Her thoughts were a tangled mess, but one thing was crystal clear and resolute: she couldn't keep entangled with Jeffrey like this.

She had to make him understand that they were worlds apart, that it was impossible for them to be together! Aside from his good looks, he embodied everything she despised.

He was a playboy, a rogue, disrespectful, irresponsible man. To top it off, he had a past crush on the likes of Heather!

Anyone who dated him was truly out of luck!

When Jeffrey returned with the pill, Karen didn't hesitate for a second and washed it down with water.

"The pharmacist said there might be some side effects, like dizziness or nausea."

"Whatever." As long as she wasn't getting pregnant!

Karen didn't wait for him to offer her clothes; she had to leave now. She'd managed to fend off her parents' questions for the time being, but she couldn't avoid a lecture when she got home.

Just thinking about it was irking! This content provided by N(o)velDrama].[Org.

"Lend me a T-shirt." Her pants were still wearable; she just needed a top.

"I'll take you out to buy a new one."

"No need, I have to go." Karen's refusal was firm, eager to draw a line between them right there and then.

As he went to fetch a shirt, Karen added, "Don't bother with anything expensive, I can't afford it."

She didn't want to give him any excuse to keep pestering her!

Jeffrey handed her a plain white tee, "You don't have to return it. I've got plenty."

"Fine." Karen slipped it on, grabbed her phone, and headed for the door.

Jeffrey followed her to the foyer, and as she reached for the door handle, he couldn't hold back anymore and tried to stop her.

"You're just going to leave like that?"

"What else do you expect me to do?" She still had to go home and clean up the mess he made, bit by bit!

She could tell from Kenneth's tone on the phone that he suspected something was off. Her parents might be easy to fool, but not Kenneth. That smart man was not easily deceived.

"Give me your number."

Jeffrey had no intention of lurking around Karen's parents' place waiting for her again.

"There's no need, Mr. Turner. I've made myself clear; we're not a match."

"What would make us a match?" Jeffrey insisted, not letting go; his gaze fixed on her.

"It's never going to work." Karen squirmed, wanting to lash out but wary of provoking the man before her, who could possibly drag her back to square one. She composed herself to reason with him, "Look, a lot has happened recently, and I'm a bit

overwhelmed. Let me go home and think things over. Once I've figured it out, I'll get back to you with an answer."

Chapter 576

Jeffrey felt like Karen's words were just a brush-off.

"Answer? How can you give me an answer?"

They didn't even have each other's phone numbers. Was he supposed to just wait around, hoping she'd pop by to give him her decision?

Karen hesitated for a moment, then with a half-smile, she said, "Oh, alright then. Jot down my number, it's 555-867-5309."

After rattling off the digits, she turned to leave.

Jeffrey grabbed her sleeve before she could walk away!

The next second, his phone played a soulless electronic tone—

"The number you have dialed is not in service. Please check the number and dial again..."

Karen was taken aback. She didn't expect him to call right then and there!

The situation was awkward to say the least.

Jeffrey just stared at her silently.

Slapping her forehead, Karen said, "I must've mixed up a digit. Try dialing it again!"

She repeated the number, and this time when he called, her phone actually rang.

"There, all set. I should get going now."

Karen glanced at the grip he still had on her.

Jeffrey frowned, slowly letting go, "I'll be waiting for your answer. Don't take too long."

"Okay, okay!"

Karen didn't even bother saying goodbye; she just bolted.

Jeffrey had planned a day to charm her—stroll through the mall, grab some lunch, maybe pick out a little something special for her. But waking up to this was a cold splash of reality.

Her attitude hadn't changed one bit and she was still playing hard to get.

And her promise to think it over? Jeffrey was a playboy but he wasn't stupid. He knew a stalling tactic when he saw one.

But chasing her was wearing him out. Maybe it was good for both of them to take a step back and think. Lately, he hadn't felt like himself at all.

He trudged back to his room and flopped onto the bed. Karen's scent was still lingering on the pillows.

It only added to his frustration.

His ringing phone pulled him back to reality. It was Everett.

"You up?"

"Yeah," Jeffrey said, peeling off his hoodie as he prepared for a shower,

"What's up?"

"Are you coming into the office today? There's a meeting with the domestic stakeholders, and I'd like you to attend."

It would be awkward to send Kevin; he was a great assistant but not suitable for such a high-profile meeting.

Jeffrey sighed, "Alright, I'll be there soon. Have Kevin send me the brief."

"Will do," Everett replied, then added in a lower tone, "What's wrong with you?" This content provided by N(o)velDrama].[Org.

"What do you think? Dorothy's bestie's got me tied in knots!" Jeffrey grumbled, "I've humbled myself like never before, and she's still not budging. All my life, women have chased after me. When have I ever been this desperate over a girl?"

"She thinks you can't be faithful."

"Exactly!" Jeffrey had no secrets from Everett, "But I've told her that I'm done with the games. I even offered to marry her if that'll make her happy. I pulled a move like you did with Dorothy. Once it's a done deal, both our folks would have to accept it, right? How perfect would that be?"

There was a soft cough from Everett's end, "That wasn't a 'move' on my part."

"That was premeditated. If not a 'move', then what?"

Everett didn't say a word on the other side.

"Come on, help me out here. How did you get Dorothy to fall for you?" Jeffrey was ready to swallow his pride and learn.

There was a brief silence on the line before Everett spoke, "She didn't fall for me. At most, she just like me."

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 577 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 577

"You already have two kids!"

"Dorothy's planning to leave once I'm all healed up," admitted Everett, who wished he could be oblivious to Dorothy's intentions. It would spare him the anxiety of living like a man with a sword hanging over his head during his recovery.

"Look, you two are already knee-deep in this. Why don't you just bite the bullet, march her down to the courthouse, and get hitched? Keep her by your side for good! Who's

going to stop you now, anyway? You've always been too considerate of Dorothy's feelings right from the get-go!"

"And do you still think you can tie down Karen like that?"

Jeffrey's voice was so hoarse that he could barely squeeze the words out.

"Uh... that's different. She really doesn't have any feelings for me! She's even got herself dolled up, bought a new dress, and is getting ready for blind dates!"

The very thought riled him up!

Everett's voice deepened, "You head to the office. If you need me, give me a call."

"Will do!"

"Oh, and Dorothy and I are heading back home next week to pick up the kiddos."

Jeffrey was taken aback. He quickly grilled, "You going to Karen's to pick them up?"

"Yeah."

"Then count me in!" he declared, then realizing something was off, he mumbled an excuse, "I just miss the little tyke, Langston. It's not about seeing Karen! She said she needed time to think, and I

won't bother her until she's figured it out."

Everett didn't want to strip a man of his last shred of dignity, so he just grunted an acknowledgment and hung up.

Jeffrey stared at his phone and double-checked the date.

She should have made up her mind a week later, right?

...

As the days slipped by, Dorothy knew she couldn't dodge the inevitable forever.

After much inner turmoil, she finally called Karen.

"Everett and I are heading back home."

"Huh? I thought you guys were staying in Swevia Country?" Karen was ecstatic to hear her best friend was coming home, "When are you arriving? Kenneth and I will pick you up! Oh... wait, he can't come. I'll come alone!"

Dorothy hesitated before gently saying, "Everett plans to bring Abigail and Langston back to Swevia Country. Once he's fully recovered, he wants the kids to stay with him."

"What do you mean?" Karen felt her brain struggling to keep up.

"Abigail and Langston... won't be living with us anymore."

"What? Can Kenneth handle that?" Karen blurted out without thinking, making it even harder for Dorothy to continue.

Both fell silent for a few seconds before Karen tentatively spoke, "You don't want to tell Kenneth yourself, so you want me to break it to him first?"

"Yeah..."

"This is going to be too cruel for him. He'll be devastated." Karen cared deeply for her brother, Kenneth. He had always been so good to her so how could she not be heartbroken? "Don't be fooled by his tough exterior; he's hurting on the inside. And now, you're talking about taking the kids away..."

"Byte 7 said the video footage could be restored in a month, and it's already been ten days. At most, in another twenty days, we'll have to settle things with the Lopez family."

While Kenneth felt the pain, it was just as real for Dorothy.

"But during your fight with the Lopez family, won't they mistreat Abigail and Langston? They're capable of anything!"

Karen was genuinely protective of the two children and ready to defend them with her life. That was why she was so worried.

"I believe Everett will protect them. He promised me that."

Chapter 578

"But..."

"Karen, I've prepared for the worst, but Abigail and Langston's life has just begun! Only with Everett can they have a life of ease and comfort."

Karen was well aware of the hardships of this path. As a friend, she could only offer as much help as possible.

"Alright, I'll go talk to my brother."

...

The day Dorothy returned from her trip to Swevia Country, she got up early to pack her bags.

Quincy came over to change Everett's bandages and left some extra with strict instructions to remind him to change them during the trip back.

She didn't advise Everett to travel at that moment because his wounds hadn't fully healed, but he was not the kind to heed a doctor's advice.

"Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on him and try to avoid aggravating the injury."

"Mhm," Quincy nodded, seemingly with more to say. But in the end, she just waved her hand, "See you in a week!"

"See you."

Dorothy got into the car with Everett, and they headed for the airport.

She spent the whole ride gazing out the car window, lost in thought.

Everett caught glimpses of her, but she never seemed to notice.

As they approached the airport, he finally reached out, pulling Dorothy into his embrace, his voice low and tender, "Stop worrying, okay?"

"You know what I'm thinking?"

"Besides Kenneth, what else could be on your mind?" Everett had been holding back, but now he couldn't contain himself any longer.

He wished he could crack open Dorothy's head and excavate Kenneth completely from her thoughts!

Because of his presence, things were awkward!

Not like with Lane, who he could deal with any way he wanted, and Dorothy wouldn't get involved!

But Kenneth...

Everett didn't dare touch him. He was afraid that Dorothy might turn against him.

And he had to admit, Kenneth had genuinely looked after the kids for many years. He owed a lot to Kenneth.

Sometimes Dorothy really wanted to know if Everett had installed some kind of surveillance in her brain, how else could he always know exactly what she was thinking?

"I just don't know how to face him. I'm afraid he'll blame me."

"Abigail and Langston are our children. What are you afraid of him for?"

"But most of the time, it was Kenneth who took care of them."

It was like she planted the seed, but Kenneth did all the subsequent tilling, weeding, and nurturing, and now she was about to take the fruits of his labor!

It was a difficult situation.

"I'll compensate him, as long as his demands aren't unreasonable."

But nothing like handing Dorothy over to him!

"He won't want any compensation," Dorothy sighed.

Everett frowned, pulling her closer and capturing her sighing lips in a kiss!

"Mmm..."

He kissed her deliberately hard, with a deep, probing insistence, prying her lips apart.

He wanted to erase Kenneth's name from Dorothy's mind, even if just for a moment!

Dorothy was taken aback by the sudden kiss, startled at first.

But soon enough, he had her feeling all fluttery inside.

When the kiss ended, Dorothy's cheeks were flushed, and the sight made Everett's lower abdomen tighten with desire!

Unfortunately, they were nearly at the airport.

"Still thinking about someone else?"

Dorothy glared at him teasingly, "When did you learn to be such a rogue?"

"If I weren't a rogue, you wouldn't be sitting beside me now," Everett lifted her onto his lap, "Dorothy, don't leave me. Otherwise, I don't know what I'd become."

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Dorothy remained silent.

Surprisingly, Everett didn't push her for an answer. Or perhaps, deep down, he already knew what it was.

...

Truth be told, even if Dorothy hadn't asked Karen to break the news in advance, Kenneth knew a day like this would come eventually.

After all, the children weren't really his. Everett wouldn't let him play dad forever.

In a few hours, Dorothy and Everett would be landing at Eldorria City Airport.

Kenneth watched as the living room bustled, the two kids dressed and ready to go with Karen to pick them up. A complex mix of emotions brewed inside him.

Karen was ruffling Abigail's hair, laughing and chasing after the kids. She looked up and caught Kenneth's pained expression.

"Hey, you munchkins, keep playing. Aunt Karen needs to chat with Kenneth for a sec."

She gave Abigail's head a gentle pat before walking over to Kenneth.

"Something eating you up, Kenneth?"

Kenneth's lips twisted into a half-smile. "Like I could hide it from you."

"Don't you worry, Kenneth. Dorothy will be back for good in like, twenty days max! As soon as they get the security footage from Byte 7 sorted, she's gonna hit Everett's mom and Heather with a lawsuit."

As the other man in the picture, Kenneth should have felt a twinge of joy at the news.

But his concern overshadowed everything else.

"Dorothy could be in real danger."

"Yeah, I told her that! When we were in Swevia Country, I seriously thought about convincing her to drop it, to just let it go. I mean, Everett's got her back now, even his parents can't touch her."

Kenneth took a deep breath and cut her off before she could finish, "Dorothy won't agree to that. Her mom's death was so sudden. It's been her driving force ever since she was little."

Dorothy had scrimped and saved, worked multiple jobs through the toughest of student days, all to pay for her mom's medical bills. To see her mother well again was Dorothy's ultimate resolve!

Just as her mom seemed to be getting better post-surgery, the news of her death came crashing down.

That kind of loss was unbearable.

A mother's murder was an unforgivable sin.

"But she can't let hate ruin her life, can she?"

Kenneth looked Karen in the eye, his voice serious as he asked, "If it were you, could you let your mother's killer walk free?"

Karen fell silent. She wouldn't either.

"Dorothy's different, Karen. She grew up without a father. Her mom was her only family, her entire world. It means more to her than you can imagine."

"Yeah, I get it now. After you put it that way, I totally see where Dorothy's coming from." Karen's brow furrowed. "Everett's parents, they're the worst! If it weren't for this mess, she and Everett—"

Kenneth gave her a look and smiled, "It's okay, I know she loves Everett."

"Kenneth..."

"Everett has done so much for her, it's only natural she'd fall for him." Kenneth wasn't blind to reality. He just regretted not meeting Dorothy sooner. "That day when I learned Everett would risk his life for Dorothy, I knew I'd lost completely, without a chance."

If he were in her shoes, he probably would have fallen hopelessly in love with Everett too.

Who wouldn't be moved by such fierce and devoted love?

"The way Everett, with all his stature and status, has been secretly pining after a girl for over a decade. Karen, I've got to hand it to him."

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"Indeed."

When Karen first found out that Everett had a thing for Dorothy, she was gobsmacked!

Every girl dreams about some high-powered CEO sweeping her off her feet, but the reality of bridging that gap isn't just about mutual attraction. It's about crossing a minefield of social lines.

"Ah, if only I had introduced you two sooner!" lamented Karen, then caught herself, "And, Kenneth, if only you had broken up with your ex a bit earlier! The moment I heard you were single, I played matchmaker with Dorothy. You can't pin this one on me!"

Kenneth chuckled and ruffled her messy hair.

"It's just not meant to be, no one's to blame."

...

Dorothy had slept through most of the flight. She only woke up when the plane began its descent.

The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was Everett's gaze locked on hers.

He was half-reclined in his seat, propping himself up with one arm. The recent events had slimmed him down, making his features even more sharply defined and his presence somewhat more brooding.

Dressed down in a simple white T-shirt rather than his usual business attire, Dorothy thought she was back in middle school for a moment, gazing at the boy who used to steal her breath away.

"Have you been staring at me this whole time?"

Dorothy noticed the deep creases in his palm.

He had been holding that pose for a while!

"Not for long." Just a few hours.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, Dorothy's cheeks turned pink, "Are we about to land? Karen's probably waiting for us at the airport."

"You got Karen to come?"

"Yeah."

Everett frowned slightly, "There's something I need to tell you before we land."

Dorothy saw the seriousness on his face and quickly asked, "What?"

"Jeffrey is here too, to pick us up."

...

After dropping Karen and the kids off at the airport, Kenneth made his exit. He just couldn't bear to see them all lovey-dovey, so he chose not to stay.

There were enough cars coming for Everett. They'd have room to spare.

As soon as Jeffrey's car pulled up to the airport, he spotted Karen leading a child by each hand towards the arrivals hall.

He ditched his car at the curb and strode after them.

"Aunt Karen, will Mommy buy me candy?" Abigail's concern was always straightforward – as long as there was candy, she was happy!

She had a sweet tooth. If it wasn't for the fear of ruining her teeth, she'd have a lollipop in her mouth around the clock!

"Don't worry, sweetheart. From now on, you can have all the candy you want!"

Abigail clapped her hands with glee, but Langston looked more reserved.

Karen noticed and crouched down to his level, "Langston, what's on your mind?"

"Aunt Karen, I don't want to leave Eldorria City."

He had only just arrived, and there was so much here that fascinated him!

"You won't be away for long. Your... your dad is hurt, and he's just recuperating in Swevia Country. Once he's better, you'll come back."

Langston looked up at her, a hint of mistrust in his eyes, "You won't send me abroad again?"

"Of course not! Now, Abigail and Langston, your dad's back! And Mommy will be with you in Swevia Country too!"

Hearing this, Langston's expression eased a bit.

Before he could say anything else, suddenly, Langston heard someone calling his name from behind!

He turned his little face and saw Jeffrey.

"Mr. Turner!"

Karen followed his gaze.

What was he doing here too?