

## Midnight 641

### Chapter 641

Jeffrey wrapped his arms around her and with an easy motion; they both tumbled onto the couch.

"So why don't you just stay? Live here," he whispered, leaning in to plant a series of delicate kisses on her lips. "And if you feel weird about staying at my place, I could even put the house in your name."

"I'm not ready to think about marriage just yet."

"It doesn't have to be about marriage. The offer stands regardless."

Karen furrowed her brows, "Are you always this generous with women? We're talking about a villa in Eldorria City."

Even without knowing the exact figure, she was sure it wasn't cheap!

"Only the most generous for you," Jeffrey said, his gaze steady and unflinching, emphasizing every word. "Really, you're the only one I've ever brought home to meet my folks. The rest were just for fun."

Karen couldn't help but laugh, "So you admit you're a bit of a playboy then!"

"That's so unfair. I never made any promises to them! It was all just for fun from the get-go."

Jeffrey wasn't one for chasing after anyone. Most of his flings were one-night stands from the bar scene—pick up someone appealing, spend the night, leave some cash, and that was that.

None stayed around for more than a week.

Karen rolled her eyes. "I forgot to ask, with your kind of 'fun,' aren't you worried about catching something?"

"Catching what?" Jeffrey blinked, then quickly raised his hand as if taking an oath. "Absolutely not, I'm always careful."

He was scared, too. Even if there were no diseases, an unexpected child could be catastrophic.

"From the way you talk, it sounds like I should pat you on the back for that."

"No need, no need," Jeffrey quickly replied with a charming smile. "Once Everett wraps up his work, let's invite them for a proper meal! They picked us up from the airport twice, and we haven't had a chance to sit down for a decent dinner. They're heading back to Swevia Country soon, and who knows how long it'll be before we see them again."

"In half a month, Dorothy will be back."

Jeffrey raised an eyebrow. "Why's that?"

Karen realized she'd spoken out of turn and quickly waved her hands dismissively, "Just a guess!"

"Don't you dare let Dorothy come back without settling things with Everett. They should lock it down for good, grow old together. Have you seen the state Everett's in? If Dorothy leaves him again, I think it'd kill him."

Karen was left speechless.

"You have no idea. In the four years Dorothy's been gone, Everett's been madly filling every moment with work—trips, meetings, overtime, shuttling between the company and Bay Residence. His only downtime was spent tracking down Dorothy's whereabouts and torturing himself with every trace she left behind." Back then, Jeffrey genuinely feared for Everett's life.

No one's body could withstand such abuse.

He'd never seen even a hint of a smile on Everett's face, which promoted him to work overtime as well, anxious not to upset Everett further.

"Everett... he really loves Dorothy." Karen had to admit, both in heart and voice.

"And what about Dorothy? Does she love Everett?" Jeffrey's voice grew heavy, "Honestly, I feel like she hasn't given nearly as much to Everett as he's given to her."

"Do you know about the time Dorothy nearly died giving birth to Abigail and Langston? I was terrified. Signing the critical condition notice, I thought we were going to lose her."

Jeffrey was at a loss for words.

Karen let out a sigh, "Having grown up in a stable, two-parent household, it's natural that you may not fully grasp Dorothy's actions and decisions. But from my perspective, Dorothy has already given Everett the greatest love she can."

Chapter 642

Karen had known Dorothy for a long time, and she knew that, before meeting Everett, Dorothy had been as cold as a winter's day to just about every guy out there.

In fact, even when sometimes all others needed was a little smile or a sweet word from her to smooth things over, she had refused to do so. She had a major case of man-repellent vibes!

Seeing that Jeffrey still seemed not to understand, Karen tried to break it down for him in a different way.

"Imagine you have a million bucks," she said, "and you decided to give me eight hundred thousand. Everyone's gonna think you're head over heels for me, right? But what if I can't match that? Perhaps I only have ten thousand to my name, but I'm willing to give you every last penny. To outsiders, the difference between eight hundred thousand and ten thousand is huge. They'll start questioning the sincerity of our love, never realizing that those ten thousand is all I've got."

Karen continued, "Dorothy was instilled with the belief from a young age to stay away from men, as they are all up to no good. Bella's greatest fear was that her daughter would repeat her own mistakes. However, when Dorothy discovered she was pregnant, she willingly chose to stay, boldly contradicting her mother's long-standing teachings and traversing the path her mother once took. The authenticity of her love should not be questioned."

Jeffrey understood; he just smacked his lips and finally let out a sigh, "But Everett... that guy's got it tough, too. To stay true to Dorothy for over a decade, that's something else. Not many guys can do that."

"Yeah, you got that right."

"But hey, look at them now, as harmonious as a symphony, with kids and all. Nothing's standing in their way anymore. Just waiting for them to renew their vows and have the wedding they deserve.

After that, it's our turn in the spotlight."

Karen couldn't help but smirk.

Have the wedding they deserve?

She wasn't so sure.

...

Dorothy thought that after Everett finished his meeting, he'd call her back.

He always used to!

But she waited and waited, hours passing by. She even got Abigail and Langston down for a nap, had them wake up again, and still, not a peep from her phone.

What kind of meeting lasts that long?

She was tempted to call and check in, but she didn't want to interrupt his work.

Everett had been seriously injured saving her, so there must have been a backlog of work at the Lopez Corporation. As the CEO, with his strong sense of responsibility and dedication, it was only natural for him to be swamped at the office.

She figured that by nightfall, Everett would surely call her back. She decided to wait a little longer.

"Mommy, why isn't Daddy home today?" Abigail, no longer used to his absence, asked as she came downstairs and took her mother's hand.

"Daddy's very busy with work. He spent all his time with you, your brother, and me before. Now that we're getting ready to head back to Swevia Country, he's got to wrap things up at his job!"

Abigail pouted, "Will he bring me candy when he's done with work?"

"Do you not want your teeth anymore?"

"But I really want some candy!"

Dorothy couldn't resist her daughter's charm and got up to fetch a small piece of candy from the drawer.

Soon after, Langston came downstairs with his laptop and opened it up on the table for his mom to see.

"Dad's acting weird today."

"What's wrong?"

"He's completely offline." Langston pointed to the grayed-out avatar. "Didn't he say he'd be busy at the office? He's not even logged into the Lopez Corporation's system?"

Dorothy took a closer look.

He really wasn't.

The screen showed that Everett was online in the morning, but after that, he'd been offline all day.

## Chapter 643

"He's probably... gone incognito or something, right?"

After all, Everett's system access was way more advanced than that of the other employees. A little invisibility trick was definitely within his capabilities.

"I checked, he's not incognito, just not here."

"Maybe he's in a meeting that doesn't require system access."

These kinds of meetings surely existed, like listening to subordinates' reports, quarterly reviews, or handling project receptions, legal department contract liaisons, and so on.

But, typically, Kevin could handle such tasks; it was unusual for Everett to handle them personally.

Especially when he hadn't even returned a single call, just for those tasks?

"Why not give him another call! I have this sneaky suspicion Dad might be having an affair."

Dorothy sighed, giving her son's head a gentle pat. "Don't talk nonsense! Your father would never do such a thing. Where on earth are you picking up such words? Don't use them again, okay?"

Langston stuck out his tongue and then bounded upstairs with Abigail.

They continued to play, carefree as ever, leaving Dorothy with a nagging sense of uncertainty.

Everett was acting out of character.

After a few minutes of internal debate, Dorothy finally picked up her phone.

She wasn't worried about infidelity; she was worried something had happened to him, and he was keeping it from her!

This time, the phone rang and rang with no answer.

Dorothy's anxiety spiked; she tried again, still no answer.

She decided to call Kevin's mobile number directly, and after a few tones, Kevin picked up.

"Ms. Sanchez."

"Kevin, are you at the office?"

"Uh, yes, I am. What's up?"

"I've been trying to call Everett, and he's not answering. Is he still tied up?" Dorothy stood up from the couch, ready to grab her car keys and head to the office to see for herself.

Kevin, unaware that she was planning to come over, continued to fumble his words, "Yeah, Mr. Lopez is still swamped. Lots to do today, probably missed his phone!"

"Did you tell him about the call I made this morning?"

"No, I haven't. I got caught up, totally slipped my mind. Sorry about that, Ms. Sanchez."

"It's okay. You guys keep at it."

Dorothy hung up and stepped out the door without hesitation.

Kevin's tone was a clear giveaway; something was off with Everett. She needed to see what was going on for herself!

Heading to Lopez Corporation, Dorothy decided to take Everett's Maybach, just in case.

The security at the parking garage didn't stop her for identification, allowing her smooth passage.

Upon entering the grand lobby of Lopez Corporation, she didn't head straight for the CEO's office floor. Instead, she pressed the button for the floor where Everett often held meetings.

However, the meeting rooms were empty, not a soul in sight, not even a lower-level meeting in progress, so Kevin couldn't possibly be busy!

Dorothy's mind was a whirlwind of confusion, and she didn't want to speculate.

She took the elevator straight to the CEO's office.

Just as she expected, the lights were off, and no one was there.

Standing at the door of the CEO's office, she dialed Kevin's number again.

"Ms. Sanchez, something else?"

"Where are you right now?"

"I... I'm in the CEO's office with Mr. Lopez."

"Then come out. I'm at the door."

There was silence on the other end for almost a minute before Kevin spoke in astonishment, "You... you came to the office!"

"Tell me the truth, where is Everett? What's really going on?"

"I... I can't, Mr. Lopez told me not to say anything." Kevin sounded almost tearful, "Ms. Sanchez, maybe you should try calling Mr. Lopez again?"

Chapter 644

Sandwiched in the middle of a dilemma, Kevin was definitely feeling the pinch.

"Everett's not picking up his phone."

"Then keep calling until he does. Mr. Lopez is holding onto his phone."

Dorothy's brows knitted in frustration. "Alright, I got it."

She ended the call and switched to texting on Everett's WhatsApp.

[Call me back, or you can forget about seeing me again!]

True to form, less than a minute after she hit send, her phone rang with Everett's name flashing on the screen.

Taking the call, Dorothy made her way to the CEO's office door and punched in the code - 0825.

The lock beeped affirmatively.

Sure enough, the office code hadn't changed.

On the phone, Everett's deep, raspy voice came through. "You're in my office?"

He could tell just from the sound!

"Yeah," Dorothy didn't bother hiding it, "Aren't you supposed to be at the company? And making Kevin keep secrets from me, what's that about?"

"You care?"

"Don't give me that!" Dorothy was irked.

She had thought Everett would never lie to her.

"I'll come to the office for you."

Everett still didn't disclose his location.

But Dorothy was persistent. "No, I'll come to you! Tell me where you are."

"You don't want to know."

"I do want to know! Everett, you better think carefully before you speak to me!"

The line went silent, and after a few seconds, he let out a heavy sigh.

"I'm at the cemetery."

"What?"

"I'm at the cemetery gate, but I haven't gone up. Don't worry, I didn't disturb your mom."

...

By the time Dorothy drove to the cemetery, dusk was already setting in.

She had thought Everett and Kevin were together, only to realize that Kevin had followed Everett due to sensing something was off. Not daring to get too close, he just sat in his car, watching from a distance.

Dorothy got out of her car and jogged towards Everett.

He stood straight at the cemetery's main gate, indeed not having entered.

Numerous orange-red cigarette butts lay at his feet, too many to count, and as she approached, the unmistakable smell of tobacco filled the air.

Everett turned upon hearing her approach, offering a half-hearted smile. When he spoke, his voice was so dry that it seemed to crack.

"You see, I've just been here a while, no women around."

Dorothy sighed, "I never suspected you of anything."

She moved closer, but Everett stepped back. "I smell like smoke."

"And you still smoke so much? Everett, you're still recovering from injuries! Do you want lung cancer or what?"

He gave a wry smile, "Not quite there yet."

"Let's go home, okay?" Dorothy didn't want to stand around in a place like this at night.

Everett nodded, then said, "You and Kevin go ahead; I'll follow."

"What's the fuss about?" Dorothy pursed her lips, stubbornly walking over to grasp his arm. "Is this all because I didn't take you to visit my mother's grave?"

"Dorothy," Everett's voice was heavy.

Thinking he was going to say something, she looked up at him, waiting.

However, all that followed was a sigh. "Let's go home."

"You haven't finished what you were saying!"

"There's nothing to say. I just came to have a look."

"Everett!"

He pressed his lips together, took off his jacket, and draped it over Dorothy's shoulders. "The wind's picking up. Let's go home. I'll ice your ankle when we get home."

Chapter 645

Dorothy only realized something was off as she settled into the car, headed towards Bay Residence.

How on earth did Everett know about her twisted ankle?

Everett was focused on the road; he addressed her unspoken question before she could voice it.

"The car you saw this morning, it was mine."

"Oh..." Dorothy found herself at a loss for words.

Pursuing this topic would unavoidably lead to explaining why she hadn't invited Everett to pay respects to her mother.

He didn't press further, though. Despite both sitting in the front, an invisible wall seemed to have erected between them. Neither had the courage to tear it down.

Back at home, Everett headed straight for the master bathroom to shower.

Dorothy knew that even he himself couldn't stand that smell of smoke!

She checked on the kids upstairs; the hired chef had already prepared their dinner, and they were now scattered, each absorbed in their own activities.

Upon returning to the bedroom, she noticed Everett hadn't turned on the lights.

As she reached for the switch, her hand was suddenly enveloped, and in a swift motion, she was lifted into the air and pressed onto the bed.

"Everett..."

"Don't talk just yet."

His voice was as husky as ever, his Adam's apple bobbing as he spoke. The smoky scent was gone, replaced by his own unique fragrance.

Dorothy instinctively reached for his clothes, only to find he wasn't wearing any, her fingers grazing his cool skin fresh from the shower.

Everett was eager, almost like a teenager experiencing his first taste of passion.

Before she could adjust, he began to move with a fervor that left her wincing in pain, but she bit her lip, neither pushing him away nor protesting.

He devoured her with a desperate intensity, sealing her lips with his, again and again...

She felt like a small boat adrift on the sea, pushed by relentless waves, unsure of where to anchor or when the tumult would end.

All she could do was relax as best she could, meeting his ferocity to spare herself greater discomfort.

"Mmm..."

Eventually, Dorothy sensed this wasn't about pleasure for him; he was desperately trying to prove something.

It was about proving she was his, affirming that he was the only man who could touch her, possess her like this.

So, she reached out, embracing his narrow waist, silently conceding to his claim.

"Dorothy, say you won't leave me," Everett's voice was raw as he felt her touch.

But Dorothy only pursed her lips, refusing to echo his words.

"Say it, you won't leave me, you never will!"

Dorothy remained silent.

"Dorothy!"

She brought her hand to his neck, her voice tender with emotion, "Everett, I will be yours only."

Everett's body tensed.

"In this life, my heart has no room for another man."

No matter how wonderful Kenneth was, no matter how much he moved her, he could never penetrate her heart.

It was filled to the brim, not an inch to spare.

"Then say you won't leave me."

Dorothy fell silent once again.

"Say it!" Everett's eyes were fierce, his demand a low growl in her ear, "Say it, and I'll believe you."

Dorothy shook her head, drawing him closer, "Everett, I want you to weigh down on me more."

There was no response from Everett.

"Come in to me completely, will you?"

He frowned, beads of sweat rolling from his temple, spattering on her skin, "It will hurt."

"But that's what I want, please."

Chapter 646



After uttering those words, Dorothy closed her eyes, her body starting to tremble ever so slightly as if bracing for the agony that was imminent.

But the pain didn't come.

Instead, what arrived was him propping himself up and withdrawing from her.

"I don't want you to compensate me in this way," he said, dropping the words like a stone before turning and walking into the bathroom.

Dorothy remained lying on the bed, her hair splayed out around her like strands of seaweed.

With his weight lifted, the air rushed back into her lungs in greedy gulps, and a bitter smile flickered across her lips.

Was this compensation?

Not really.

She just wanted to feel Everett. Truly feel him intimately.

Even if it meant pain, it was something real.

The sound of water from the bathroom started up again, a gentle patter.

Dorothy sat up in bed, didn't bother with the lights, and just sat on the edge, waiting for him.

When Everett emerged with a towel wrapped around his waist, she was there to meet him with an embrace.

"Just this once, no questions, okay, Everett?"

"About your mom?"

Dorothy nodded.

"Alright, I won't ask."

He was always the one to give in, and he was used to it by now.

Everett stroked her hair. "Were you scared today?"

"Yeah, I thought something happened to you."

He never willingly cut contact with her, and she worried—was it an infection, had his condition worsened, was he in a hospital somewhere, or had there been an accident...

Countless possibilities had flitted through Dorothy's mind, but she never imagined he'd gone to the cemetery.

"I'm tough as nails, nothing's going to happen."

"Well, if you don't take care of yourself, who knows?"

Everett chuckled, pulling her into his lap.

"If I died, Kenneth would be over the moon."

"Why bring him up again?"

"Didn't Kenneth flaunt in front of you that he could go to the cemetery, and I couldn't? That's just showing off."

Everett was too smart not to understand.

Dorothy paused, instinctively wanting to explain, "I didn't tell Kenneth I was going today. He didn't know! It was a coincidence we met there, and then... we walked down together."

"As far as I know, he doesn't have any family buried there."

That was true.

"And I overheard a staff member saying he was visiting his mother-in-law."

Dorothy was surprised. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Kenneth wouldn't do that. Look, we brought our kids back, and although he was reluctant, he didn't stop us! We've talked privately many times, and he's agreed to start dating and find a girlfriend. Can't you stop being hostile towards him, please?"

"We'll see when he actually finds a girlfriend."

Everett didn't believe Kenneth would follow through.

Dorothy sighed softly, "I don't want to argue about this, make it seem like I'm defending Kenneth, and then you get jealous again. All I know is Kenneth and I can only be friends, nothing more."

In the darkness, Everett's gaze locked onto Dorothy's eyes.

They looked at each other for a long while before he finally exhaled deeply.

"I can never seem to win with you."

It felt like he was the only one ever caught in a bind.

"How could that be? You're the big boss, after all."

"With you in the way, how can I be?"

If it weren't for Dorothy, Kenneth would have been sent far from the country long ago, never to return! He could give Kenneth money, a place to stay, a house, a car, but he had to keep him away from Dorothy!

Chapter 647

"Quit laying down the law with Kenneth, will ya?"

Everett lifted his hand, pinching her cheek playfully. "If you need a reference on how that goes, just take a look at what happened to Lane."

Dorothy fell silent, genuinely considering it.

Yeah, he could be quite the dictator.

"Tired? Let's hit the sack," he said, wrapping his arms around Dorothy, who by now felt as limp as overcooked spaghetti in his embrace.

But today, Dorothy had a stubborn streak.

She reached out with her delicate hand, tracing circles on Everett's chest, igniting sparks everywhere.

"You didn't... finish it before..."

She vaguely remembered something Karen had once told her – that it's super uncomfortable for a guy if things get interrupted.

Sure enough, as soon as she mentioned it, Dorothy could feel the heat rising off his skin, his breath staggering slightly out of sync.

"Do you even know what you're talking about?"

"Take a wild guess?"

Dorothy chuckled, wrapping her arms around his neck, deliberately breathing onto his chest in quick, ticklish bursts. "Am I not attractive to you anymore?"

Everett could almost hear his self-control shattering.

"Dorothy."

"Yeah?"

"No regrets."

Before she could utter another word, all her protests were muffled by a kiss.

This time the intensity surpassed the earlier moment, Dorothy's soft moans breaking into shards.

In the thick of passion, she responded fervently, as if granting him unspoken permission to explore without end.

Until her stamina was spent, and still the man wouldn't quit.

"Everett... you're crushing me... I can't take it anymore!"

"Endure it. You started this."

He had intended to let her go!

After a night of tangles, Dorothy finally conceded.

Some things should not be said carelessly and some responsibilities were just too heavy to bear!

...

The next day, the sun was high in the sky by the time Dorothy stirred.

The man beside her had vanished.

Propping herself up, she remembered the events of last night and immediately got out of bed to look for Everett.

After searching high and low with no sign of him, she worried he might have gone to the cemetery again.

Dorothy quickly dialed his number, and Everett promptly answered, his deep voice resonating, "Awake?"

"Where did you go?" she asked, a hint of urgency in her voice.

"I'm at the office. Had to postpone a meeting yesterday; couldn't skip it today."

Hearing his voice sounding somewhat normal, Dorothy felt a bit relieved.

"So, when are you free?"

"Missing me?"

"Yeah, missing you," Dorothy admitted, her cheeks flushing.

There was a pause on the other end, "The meeting should wrap up in about half an hour."

Dorothy blinked. "So, you mean you're in a meeting right now?!"

"Yes, as we speak."

"And you're asking me if I miss you!" She could vividly picture that in the vast conference room, Everett seated at the head of the table, casually posing the question over the phone, while everyone else would have been utterly baffled!

They must have thought they were hallucinating!

Especially because Everett was known in the industry for his icy demeanor.

"Yeah, why?"

Dorothy's patience was wearing thin, "Just hang up already!"

And he had the nerve to ask why! She didn't dare entertain the thought any longer.

Everett chuckled, "Why don't you come over to the office, Ms. Sanchez?"

It slipped her mind she was still on the payroll of Lopez Corporation.

"Alright, you carry on with your meeting. I'll get ready and head over."

"Sounds good."

After hanging up, Dorothy quickly touched her burning cheeks.

Everett was really not caring one bit about maintaining his cool and aloof public image!

Chapter 648

In the hushed conference room of the Lopez Corporation, managers and shareholders maintained tense silence, cautious not to disturb Mr. Lopez, who engaged in playful banter over the phone.

When the call ended, Kevin dared to clear his throat softly and spoke, "Mr. Lopez, next up is the report from Team Four."

"Alright."

Everett nodded, leaning back slightly in his chair, the cold, serious expression returning to his handsome face. "Go ahead."

...

Dorothy freshened up, slipping into a set of neutral-colored clothes, not wanting to stand out too much on her first day back at the office.

It was as if she was itching for everyone to know who she was.

Grabbing her car keys, she was about to step out when her phone buzzed with a call from Karen.

“Hey, Karen.”

“Jeffrey said he wants to get together for dinner before you two head off to Swevia Country! The last couple of times were... well, a bit eventful, so this time, no kids, just the four of us. I'd love to catch up.”

Dorothy glanced at the time. “I’m on my way to the Lopez Corporation now. Everett’s still tied up in a meeting. Once he wraps up, I’ll check with him and get back to you. Not sure what his plans are for the rest of the day.”

“Cool, just let me know!” Karen chuckled, “Jeffrey's stuck at his office too.”

“In a meeting?”

“Yep! Got called in first thing in the morning.”

Dorothy’s mouth twitched slightly.

When she had been on the phone with Everett earlier, Jeffrey surely wasn’t part of the same meeting, was he?

The very thought made her scalp tingle!

Upon reaching the Lopez Corporation, Dorothy was stopped at the entrance. Since she wasn't driving Everett's Maybach today, the security guard needed to verify her identity before nodding her through.

It was peak office hours, and the underground parking was full.

After circling around with no luck, Dorothy boldly decided to park in the CEO's reserved spot - the most spacious, conveniently located near the executive elevator.

With no one in sight, she felt free to indulge in this breach without the fear of being seen.

Dorothy made her way straight to the CEO’s office once upstairs.

She keyed in the security code with practiced ease and had barely stepped in when a message from Everett pinged on her phone.

[Wait for me in my office. Wrapping up soon.]

[How did you know I was coming to your office?]

Yesterday, he had heard the door, which wasn't strange, but today, she hadn't alerted anyone!

[There are cameras in the elevator.]

Well, that explained it!

The man was even checking the elevator cameras during a meeting!

[Mr. Lopez slacks off at work too, huh?]

She sent the teasing message and soon got a reply from Everett.

[Only for you.]

Her cheeks flushed instantly!

Scenes from the previous night, not suitable for the faint-hearted, began to intrude into her thoughts, impossible to shake off.

Dorothy cracked open the office window, letting the cool breeze in to temper the heat on her face.

From this vantage point, the view of Eldorria City was breathtaking, making everything else seem insignificant by comparison.

To think that she, of all people, could stand here and be intimately involved with the CEO of the Lopez Corporation—it was a dream too big to even dream!

Before long, Everett concluded his meeting.

He returned to his office, and the moment he opened the door, he saw the small figure by the window, his lips curving in an involuntary smile.

Dorothy heard him and turned around, smiling back. “Meeting’s over?”

“Yeah.” He shed his suit jacket and strode over to her, wrapping his arms around her from behind. “What’s on your mind?”

“It feels like I’m dreaming.” Dorothy answered honestly, nestled in his embrace.

Chapter 649

"Hah." Everett chuckled above her head, "Seems like I'm the one dreaming."

How could it be her?

He'd been harboring this dream for more than a decade. The longer it persisted, the more he dreaded waking up.

"Hmm? What?" Dorothy didn't quite catch that.

Everett, of course, wasn't about to repeat himself. He already felt low enough in front of Dorothy.

"It's nothing. Just wrapped up at work. Where do you wanna go?"

"Is Jeffrey at the office?"

Everett's thick brows furrowed. "Why do you ask about him?"

Dorothy blinked, "Karen mentioned grabbing dinner together, that's why I asked."

"He's there."

"Oh." Dorothy nodded, leaning in closer to Everett with a teasing arch of her eyebrow. "Don't tell me you're getting jealous just because I asked about Jeffrey? He's your buddy!"

"I don't like you snooping around other men."

Dorothy couldn't help but laugh.

She had no idea Everett had such a possessive streak. She used to think he was cool and somewhat detached, not paying her much mind and even giving her plenty of space. Turns out, the aloof act was just an act.

It was convincing, sure, but it must've been exhausting!

"When did you get so sour?"

"If you knew about it earlier, would you have bolted?"

Dorothy thought for a moment, smiling guiltily, "Probably."

The last thing she wanted was someone's overbearing affection or someone trying too hard to make an impression. It felt like being forced to accommodate a stranger in her world, and her first instinct would be to push back.

"See? That's why." Everett spoke as if it all made perfect sense.

Dorothy pouted, "Why do you know me so well? You didn't go and do homework on me, did you?"

"Do I need to? For someone who sat next to me for years and never even borrowed a pen, I think I got the gist."

Back in school, her mantra was to owe nothing to anyone, and to have no one owe her.

It wasn't about avoiding a loss, but more that she wasn't good at socializing or handling people's kindness and affection.

"Was I really like that?"

The words slipped out before Dorothy could stop them. Reflecting on it, she realized she really was like that.

"You were always by the book. If I even helped you with your backpack, you'd be sure to say thanks with utmost politeness."

Dorothy was at a loss for words.

"So, when you returned that letter to me back then, I thought you were rejecting me."

Everett still remembered how nervous he was placing that letter on Dorothy's desk. Unable to bear sitting down afterward, he made up an excuse about the classroom being stuffy and went out to shoot hoops with classmates.

His mind wasn't in the game. He lost miserably, consumed with thoughts of what she would say when he got back. Would she reject him or accept him?

When the bell rang and he returned to the classroom, basketball in hand, seeing Dorothy with the letter was like a punch to the gut.

The remaining hope chilled instantly.

As he approached his desk, Dorothy's voice came softly, "Everett, is this yours?"

"Yeah."

"Here."

He hesitated before taking the unopened letter back.

He knew then he was out of luck. Dorothy hadn't even bothered to read what was inside.

"There were lots of love letters for you back then. I thought that one was just another in the pile," she said, furrowing her brows and pouting slightly. "Besides, I asked you if it was yours, and you said yeah."

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"I wasn't wrong."

"Absolutely not."

Dorothy and Everett exchanged a knowing glance and broke into laughter, their shared amusement an unspoken bond.

His arm tightened around her slightly as he leaned in, his voice a low whisper. "What if you knew back then that I was the one writing you those love notes? Would you have read them?"

Caught off guard by the question, Dorothy paused, pondering over an answer that deserved more than a cursory thought.

After all, back in the day, the thought of Everett, the golden boy of the school, harboring a crush on her seemed downright implausible.

Everett, with his heartthrob looks and top-tier grades, not to mention his family's clout—heck, even the principal would bend over backward to please him. That same guy claiming to have a crush on her?

Dorothy could not even entertain the thought!

Especially since Everett was known for his aloofness back then, he was not the warmest person and probably had stronger boundaries than she did. Aside from the strictly necessary interactions between desk mates, he would not say much else.

"I'd probably think you were pulling my leg, but then again, you never struck me as the joking type," Dorothy finally admitted, still struggling to imagine how she would have reacted.

One thing was for sure - she would not have agreed to date him.

Her middle school days were when Bella was undergoing her second surgery. Back then, Dorothy was so desperate to earn money that she spent every spare moment working, and any free time left was devoted to studying.

Dating? That was the last thing on her mind.

"So, maybe it's for the best you never read them."

Everett used to think that writing those love notes to Dorothy was the most foolish and embarrassing thing he had ever done.

But now, he felt relieved she had not read them.

Back then, he was just a kid; his thoughts were not nearly as well-rounded as they were now. Even if she had said yes, their relationship might have faltered due to her sensitivities.



It was better that they both had the chance to grow up and mature. He felt more confident now.

"Everett, was I really the only one you had a crush on?" Dorothy asked, the question burning in her throat despite her reservations.

She feared it might come off as self-indulgent and annoy him, but she genuinely wanted to know.

After all, they had spent years apart with absolutely no contact.

"You were more than enough. I'm not a masochist," he quipped.

"But what if I got a boyfriend in all our years apart? What if I got married? You can't keep waiting!"

He reached up and playfully tapped her forehead.

"You're the only one who thinks we had no contact."

"Huh?"

"I was always in the class group chat. After you left that night you sent the wrong message, I left because you did."

Dorothy thought it over and realized he was right. She had rejoined the chat later to find him gone.

"Also, do you remember when you got hired by the Prosperity Consortium?"

"I applied like everyone else! I went for the interview and waited for HR to get back to me."

"Dorothy, that job fair at the Prosperity Consortium? They only hired you."

She froze, her mouth agape.

Everett let out a soft sigh. "Didn't you ever wonder why they held a job fair and only hired one assistant? Didn't you find it odd that no one else was starting at the company with you?"

Dorothy shook her head. "I... I'm not great at socializing, so I never asked."

"If I had known, I would've just brought you straight into the main office."

Maybe that way their story could have started a year and a half earlier.

He had been afraid of raising her suspicions, so he had the Prosperity Consortium organize that job fair instead of having the main office do it directly.

Everett was concerned that Dorothy might doubt the legitimacy of an offer from the Lopez Corporation.