

## Midnight 661

### Chapter 661

Seeing the thinly veiled annoyance in his gaze, Dorothy realized her response had been a bit too nonchalant.

She chuckled. "Well, it's not like you ever listened to your dad anyway."

Everett flopped back onto the bed, lifting a hand to rub his temples. "Looks like between us, I'm the only one who gets jealous."

"What's that supposed to mean? Do you expect me to storm over to Dr. Quincy's office, crying, making a scene, threatening to do something drastic?"

Everett was speechless.

He was, of course, not thinking about something so extreme. He just hoped her reaction would have a bit more emotion.

But clearly, Dorothy was more concerned about his wound.

"Never mind." Everett settled back in bed and spoke again, his voice soft, "I'll have someone else come in as the doctor."

With him saying that, Dorothy was not foolish enough to insist on Dr. Quincy if it was going to upset him.

Everett glanced over at her, frowning. "Dorothy, are you not at all afraid I'll fall for someone else?"

She was stunned for a moment.

Honestly, she had thought about it, and then again, she had not.

Her main concern was not to hold Everett back for life. When she was no longer around, she hoped Everett would find someone who truly cared for him to spend the rest of his days with.

Dorothy had not really considered the possibility of him falling out of love with her.

"Would you?" Instead of an answer, she questioned him.

Everett's voice was peculiar due to his congested nose, a trembling, low, and bubbling, his words slightly muffled as if spoken through gritted teeth, carrying an almost coy undertone.

"You really know how to take advantage of the fact I'll always be biased towards you."

"Otherwise, I would not be here."

Who was she, after all, but a speck in the vast sea of life?

Toiling through her days, bustling about her job, how could she possibly end up in Swevia Country, lying in the bed of the illustrious CEO of the Lopez Corporation?

Everett did not feel like bickering with her, so he simply pulled the covers over his head, letting his eyelids grow heavy.

At first, Dorothy thought he was just worn out from travel, maybe a minor cold, but Everett's fever fluctuated, persistently high for several days.

At its worst, his temperature spiked to 104°F, and he was out cold for the better half of a day before coming to.

Dorothy could not worry about whether Everett was willing anymore; she had to call Quincy back.

"What's going on? Why wait until it got this bad to tell me?"

Quincy frowned, flipping through Everett's lab results.

Dorothy pressed her lips, silent for a long while.

Turning her face, Quincy paused, then seemed to understand. "Mr. Lopez told you?"

"Yeah." Dorothy nodded. "But it wasn't that I didn't want to call you. It's just..."

"I get it. Mr. Lopez is trying to avoid suspicion, worried about you getting jealous, right?" Quincy smiled, jotting down notes for the nurse to fetch the injection. "Don't worry, I have no designs on Mr. Lopez. It's purely my parents' wish."

"It's not me. Everett's the worried one."

"He really is head over heels for you." Quincy dropped that comment and went out to prepare the IV supplies for Everett.

Dorothy approached the bed where Everett lay. His eyes closed, his handsome face faintly flushed, his chest rising and falling rapidly, signaling his struggle to breathe comfortably.

She reached out and took Everett's hand.

Perhaps sensing her warmth, his eyes slowly opened. "Dorothy..."

"Yeah, I'm here."

"You can't leave without saying anything."

Dorothy managed a bitter smile.

Even now, this was what he was holding onto!

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"Okay, I won't leave. How could I bear to go?"

Leaving him alone with a raging fever was something Dorothy just could not bring herself to do. Only after she promised to stay could Everett finally close his eyes, his consciousness fading again. Yet, in those last moments of awareness, he grasped her hand tightly, refusing to let go for a long time.

Dorothy knew he was living in a constant state of unease.

She had not given him a definite departure date nor played her part convincingly enough to make him truly believe she was here to stay.

Fortunately, there were only a few days left. Soon, his ordeal would be over.

It took Everett five days in Swevia Country to start feeling better.

Quincy said it was a mix of worry and old wounds that had flared up.

“But he was always fine back home.”

“When you’re tense, you can keep going on sheer willpower. Maybe once he got to Swevia Country, without the need to keep going, the illness caught up with him.”

It was only when Dorothy heard this that she realized how much Kenneth was on Everett's mind.

He was like a constant thorn in his side.

Looking back, the signs were all there.

Back home, whenever she answered a phone call, she would look up to see him leaning against a wall, smoking a cigarette. If she went out at night, he would be waiting in the living room. Even when she visited her mother's grave, he would sneak along.

Everett was really afraid of Kenneth snatching her away from him.

After all, those four years without Dorothy had been unbearably hard.

Returning to the ward, a somewhat recovered Everett found his schedule jam-packed with work and meetings.

Knowing how driven he was, Dorothy did not mind that his work took up their time together. In fact, she found him most attractive when he was immersed in his work.

She would often sneak pictures of him to keep in her album.

After one long meeting, the sky outside had darkened.

Curled on the couch, she drifted into a light sleep without realizing it.

It was not until she was lifted into the air that she sleepily opened her eyes.

"The meeting's over?" She mumbled.

"Yeah. Next time, just lie on the bed. It won't disrupt the meeting."

Dorothy chuckled and wrapped her arms around his neck. "I toss and turn in my sleep. The bed's so close to your desk. Wouldn't it be awkward if I accidentally got on camera?"

Those who faced Everett directly in meetings were surely executives from other companies or international partners.

She did not want to embarrass him.

"They know I'm not single," Everett said as he settled her into the bed, tucking her under the covers.

"But not everyone needs to know, right?"

"They also know I'm recovering in the hospital."

So, even if Dorothy accidentally appeared on camera, it would seem normal to others. Who didn't have someone to take care of them when they were sick?

But the main point was that Everett wanted people to see Dorothy by his side.

She snuggled into Everett's embrace, wanting to chat.

However, Everett was hardly in the mood for conversation.

After Dorothy had bathed, she lounged around in her nightgown, her long, slender legs carrying her to slumber on the couch. It was enough to distract Everett completely from his work.

Finally, with the meeting over and the computer off, he had more pressing matters to attend to.

Dorothy only realized something was amiss when he started to undress her without a word.

She quickly covered her nightgown with her hands. "What are you doing?"

"I've been sick for five days."

"And?"

"And you've had five days of rest from doing it."

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Dorothy was at a loss for words.

Five days of rest? Since when did missed time come with a rain check?

But before she could voice her protest, he was already inside, thrusting into her with a whirlwind of urgency.

At first, he was gentle, mindful of his size, but as passion took over, his control slipped. His hands gripped her waist, causing Dorothy to wince and instinctively try to escape the discomfort, only to be relentlessly pulled back beneath him.

Exhausted to begin with, Dorothy found herself breathless and powerless under his relentless pursuit until, in a fit of frustration, she sank her teeth into the flesh of his collarbone.

The pain seemed to spur him on even more, his vigor unwaning.

After a night tangled in the sheets, Dorothy spent the better part of the following day in bed, only to be roused in the evening by a call from Karen.

"Hello?" Dorothy croaked, her voice a raspy shadow of its usual self.

Karen paused for a good half minute before saying, "Everett really did a number on you, huh? Are you sure he's supposed to be recuperating in Swevia Country?"

Dorothy was speechless.

"Dorothy, you need to put your foot down! If this keeps up, you'll be weak as hell by the time you get back."

Dorothy massaged her temples, feeling a throbbing headache brewing. "And when you try to stop Jeffrey, does he listen?"

"No, not really."

Taking a deep breath, Dorothy glanced around the hospital room. Everett was nowhere in sight.

"Did you call for a reason?" She asked.

"Yeah! You know how Jeffrey keeps bringing up marriage; his folks have been asking me about it a lot. They're so earnest... it's making me seriously consider saying yes."

Karen was aware of the risks of a flash wedding, yet she could not help being swayed by the sincere and heartfelt look in his eyes every time he brought it up.

It was getting harder and harder for her to say no.

"Do you want to marry him?"

"Alas, I've been wrestling with it myself for days. I just can't seem to come to a decision, so I thought I'd get your take. Jeffrey's got a laundry list of flaws; he's not who I pictured myself marrying. But at the same time, he's unique, and I feel like he really cares about me."

Jeffrey had promised not to mess around, and he stuck to it.

Every day, after returning from the Lopez Corporation, he would stay home with her, watching movies and playing video games. Karen noticed how his friends would invite him out for dinner or a night on the town, but he would flatly refuse, saying he needed to be with his girlfriend. There was not a hint of reluctance or embarrassment in his voice.

It struck a chord with Karen.

"It's not just about how he treats you; it's about what you feel in your heart. Do you want to spend your life with him, day in, day out, for decades?"

"Well... if he stays true, then yes, I do."

Karen did not need to sugarcoat things with Dorothy. She could speak her mind freely.

Dorothy understood Karen's hesitation and anxiety, the fear that Jeffrey's feelings might be fleeting.

"Karen, then say yes! Marriage isn't just about signing a document. Life is long and unpredictable. If you both are thrilled at the thought of being together, take the leap. What's the worst that can happen? Divorce is the bottom line, but at least you'll have loved. No regrets! But if you turn him down now and it affects your relationship, years down the line, you might wish you had said yes."

Chapter 664

"Are you really cool with me doing this?"

Dorothy chuckled. "Why wouldn't I be? Marriage is a wonderful thing, a celebration of love! Why would I want to rain on your parade?"

Karen hesitated, her voice dropping to a whisper, "Dorothy, do you hate Jeffrey?"

"Only if he's mean to you."

"Kenneth thinks you'd be mad. He even gave me a piece of his mind, accusing me of betraying you—hooking up with a guy who used to side with Heather of all people!"

Dorothy paused, a little taken aback.

That sure sounded like something Kenneth would do.

"I'm not upset, really. I don't exactly hate Jeffrey. I don't particularly like him either. I just think he's Everett's faithful buddy who genuinely has Everett's best interests at heart. Even when he's chewed me out, looking back, it was only because he thought I was not good enough for Everett."

Viewed from another angle, Dorothy figured Karen might do the same.

"As long as you're okay, that's what matters. I've been worried sick about it."

"Karen, neither you nor Kenneth owes me anything. If anything, I owe you both. Don't worry about my feelings."

"What do you mean 'owe'? Aren't we all family here?" Karen laughed softly, then said, "Alright, I got the answer I was looking for. I'll let you get back to your rest. You need to conserve your energy for... well, night's about to fall over there."

Dorothy propped herself up on her elbow, sluggishly sitting up in bed.

"If he wants it again today, I'm ready to go to the mat with him."

If she was going to go down, she would do it with dignity!

No sooner had she spoken than Everett stepped into the room, his tall frame cloaked in a dark coat, his eyes on her.

"Who are you planning to go to the mat with?"

Great timing to overhear that!

She exchanged a few more words with Karen before hanging up, then glanced at Everett.

"Where have you been?"

"Got you a cinnamon roll." He produced a paper bag as if by magic and handed it over, "It's a specialty from Swevia Country. Give it a try."

Dorothy was surprised as she took the bag. "A specialty, huh? Was it really worth a trip?"

Everett smiled, his eyes drifting to the marks he had left on her neck, satisfied as he lifted her chin and kissed her once, twice...

"I just couldn't trust myself to stay put in the room without wanting to do it. Dig in. I got you the cinnamon rolls, Swevia meatballs, and their version of pancakes. I picked up a bit of everything."

He was clearly trying to restrain himself, having driven around Swevia Country for a good while, resisting the urge to return to the ward.

Perfect timing. Dorothy was starving.

She sampled each, deciding that the Swevia Country pancakes were the best. The meatballs had an unusual flavor—not bad, but not exactly to her taste. The cinnamon roll was a traditional food she had heard about before, but she never really liked cinnamon.

Everett watched her nibble away, her cheeks puffing out now and then, making him want to pinch them.

"What are you doing?"

"I can't help myself."

Dorothy was speechless.

Everett's smile faded, and he leaned back against the couch, crossing his long legs.

After a moment's hesitation, he finally spoke up.

"Dorothy, what do you plan to do about Heather?"

At the mention of that name, Dorothy's hand twitched. She shook her head. "I haven't decided. It's up to the court."

"You could skip that step and just tell me what you want. Whether you want to make her suffer or give her a quick out, I'll back you up."

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Everett thought Dorothy was out for some old-fashioned vigilante justice, so he went out of his way to drag the culprit into the light, ready for her to take her revenge however she saw fit.

But Dorothy was surprisingly calm.

After a long silence, she lifted her gaze to meet Everett's steady eyes.

"Having power doesn't give you the right to decide someone's fate outside the law."

"So, what do you want? Just tell me."

"I want an honest trial. I want to gather evidence and present it to the court. Let the law decide the punishment for the person who killed my mother."

She did not need to play the long game if she only wanted Heather's head.

Everett reached out and took her hand.

"Then I'll get you the evidence, okay?"

Getting a confession from Heather? Piece of cake.

"You'd do that for me?" Dorothy's eyes searched his, filled with raw sincerity and trust.

"Of course."

"Then get to it."

She figured she did not have much time left anyway. Might as well give Everett a heads-up.

He was bound to learn the truth sooner or later.

...

Karen had always admired Jeffrey's get-up-and-go attitude.

A mere whisper of agreement to marriage during a cozy evening together, and by the next day, Jeffrey's folks were already knee-deep in wedding preparations!

Watching his parents rush around as if Jeffrey was a hot potato they needed to pass off at the earliest was amusing and telling.

Initially, Karen's parents, Derek and Serena, were not on board.

After all, the couple's previous antics had left a poor impression on the older folks. But Jeffrey's relentless charm and premature adoption of "mom and dad" when addressing Karen's parents, coupled with his earnest vows on knee, eventually won them over. They agreed on an engagement but insisted on a slow planning process for the wedding.

Their darling daughter was not someone they were willing to just rush out the door.

"Alright, an engagement first works for me!" Jeffrey agreed cheerily, his goal achieved.

Now, in the eyes of Karen's circle, he was the acknowledged future son-in-law. Hence, he was no longer worried about any rivals for Karen's affections.

On their way back to his place, Jeffrey's phone was ringing off the hook.

Once or twice, Karen did not mind, but the constant buzzing was getting on her nerves.

"Why aren't you answering your phone?"

"It's just the guys calling me out for drinks. If I answer, I'll have to come up with excuses. Better to pretend I didn't see it." Jeffrey was in high spirits, driving and even humming a few bars of a song.

Karen glanced at him and murmured, "You haven't been out for a while. Is that okay?"

"No worries! There are other people in the company who handle the socializing. I used to entertain myself with it, but now that I have you, there's so much more I'd rather be doing. No time for that."

"Actually... you don't have to quit cold turkey. I'm not that petty! Just don't go chasing skirts, that's all. I can't keep you locked up at home without any friends."

Karen was not one to sweat the small stuff.

"It's a buddy's birthday today, so they're all hounding me. I've been dodging them since this afternoon at your place."

"Why don't you pick up the call and join them for some fun? Or else, we head back to your place, and you'll be bored out of your mind."

Jeffrey raised an eyebrow at her and suddenly asked, "Or... you could come with me?"

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"Me? I don't think that's a great idea." Karen hesitated. "I mean, none of them even know who I am. You guys go have fun without me."

"You're my fiancée. They're bound to meet you sooner or later. Might as well make today the day," Jeffrey insisted. Deep down, he feared any hiccups before the engagement party. Hence, he felt it was always safer to have Karen by his side to keep the doubts at bay.

What Jeffrey did not realize, however, was that this decision would be his biggest mistake.

Because Jeffrey did not anticipate running into his ex-girlfriend at this little gathering.

And sure enough, the moment he walked in, there she was, locking eyes with him.

But it was too late to turn around and leave without raising my suspicions.

"Is this the future Mrs. Turner? Wow, she's a stunner!"

Jeffrey's buddies caught sight of Karen and started ribbing them with grins.

This was a rite of passage in their group; everyone had been through it with a new girl on their arm.

Even though Karen was not a fan of such comments, she let it slide. Everyone had been drinking, and since she was the one who had pushed Jeffrey to come, she had to ensure he kept his dignity.

"Hello, everyone."

She smiled and nodded, letting Jeffrey usher her to a seat at the side of the booth.

It did not take long for the gang to sense that Jeffrey was serious this time, and the jokes at Karen's expense quickly subsided.

As the guys bantered and laughed, Jeffrey suddenly raised his glass and announced loudly, "I've got news for you all—I'm getting engaged to my lady here."

"No way!"

"Look at you, Mr. Turner! Decisive man!"

"Congratulations!"

Amid the chorus of cheers, Karen noticed the girl across the table had turned pale.

She was not alone; a man, probably her boyfriend, kept passing her bites of food.

Karen did not dwell on it, figuring maybe she just felt unwell.

After a few rounds of drinks, she excused herself to the restroom.

It was getting dark outside, and she wanted to wash off her makeup and freshen up. Since she did not wear much makeup, washing her face would not make much difference.

As she closed her eyes to splash water on her face, she heard the click of high heels entering the restroom.

Another visitor—nothing unusual for the ladies' room.

Finishing up, she looked in the mirror to find the woman from the table standing right behind her.

It was the woman who had looked unwell.

Caught off guard, Karen offered her a friendly smile. "Hey, how are you doing?"

"Not well," she replied sharply. "So, you're marrying Jeffrey?"

Karen's inner alarm bells rang loud and clear, sensing trouble. "Yes, what about it?"

She scoffed. "Funny, isn't it? Jeffrey told me he'd never get married when I was with him and that I shouldn't wait for him. And now, just two years later, he's announcing an engagement."

Oh, great. Another ex of Jeffrey's.

Karen took a deep breath, maintaining her composure. "People change; it's normal."

Like her, she never planned on marrying Jeffrey either.

"Normal?" The woman crossed her arms and laughed bitterly. "Do you think I'm just another one of Jeffrey's conquests?"

"Aren't you?"

"I was with him for nearly three years. Sure, he had his flings, but his buddies all knew me as his girlfriend."

Karen was stunned.

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The woman spoke with an air of arrogance, but Karen was not one to be trifled with.

Competing with other women was not her thing, but she most certainly was not about to let anyone walk all over her.

"If I'm not mistaken, that guy sitting next to you – he your current boyfriend? Or just a... friend with benefits?"

The woman's face paled. "I don't love him! He's the one chasing after me! I only came because I thought Jeffrey might show up tonight."

"Ah, better to have a stand-in than an empty seat, huh?" Karen chuckled. "I think I'm starting to see why Jeffrey never made you official."

Karen had a way with words that cut deep without resorting to vulgarity.

"You!" The woman was left red-faced and clearly outmatched by Karen's sharp tongue.

Karen nonchalantly shook the water off her hands, standing beside the woman. Though she was shorter, she carried herself with the stature of someone over six feet tall. "If you're not the chosen one, maybe you should do some self-reflection! Bragging to me about your fling with Jeffrey only proves you're yesterday's news. I knew right away what kind of man Jeffrey was when he chased me. If you think you can make me jealous with that, you're sorely mistaken."

It would be a lie to say Karen was not bothered at all, but to make a scene with Jeffrey over it? To break up with him? That was out of the question.

Karen had left the restroom and was heading back to the party when the woman called out from behind, "Jeffrey's just playing with you, too! You won't end up any better than me! I bet you two won't even make it to the altar!"

Her voice was loud, but Karen did not even pause in her stride.

Some people are just not worth the energy.

Back in the private room, Jeffrey was being grilled by his buddies about engagement rumors as Karen walked in. He immediately reached out and pulled her into his embrace. "You upset?"

Jeffrey was perceptive enough to pick up on her mood.

"No, just a bit light-headed from the drinks, I guess."

"Should we head home then?"

"Sounds good."

As Jeffrey stood up, their friends teased, "Mr. Turner, when did you become so whipped?"

"Come on, Karen, keep this guy in line for us! We love seeing him taken down a peg!"

Karen offered a polite smile and walked out.

Behind her, Jeffrey shrugged at his friends. "No trash talk, okay? If my lady gets mad, I'll come after you guys!"

Laughter filled the room again.

Outside the restaurant, Jeffrey caught up to Karen with his long strides and naturally took her hand.

"Feeling really bad? Want me to grab some hangover medicine?"

"No, it's not that serious. Just standing out here in the fresh air is helping a lot." Karen looked up at him.

The restaurant's sign cast a light over Jeffrey's head, highlighting his chiseled jaw and making his profile look like a finely crafted sculpture.

He had all the makings of a heartbreaker in every aspect.

Karen knew that past issues needed to be left in the past. Dwelling on them only hurt herself.

"Are you getting lost in my looks?" Jeffrey noticed her gaze and playfully leaned in closer. "Here, take a closer look!"

Karen laughed and gently pushed him away. "Let's go home."

He flashed an 'okay' sign and pressed the car key fob.

She opened the passenger door and settled in, catching a glimpse of Jeffrey's ex rushing out of the restaurant in her peripheral vision.

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She could not believe Jeffrey had missed it, but there he went, starting the car and driving off without the slightest hesitation.

Cold, that was what Karen thought of Jeffrey at that moment.

A nearly inaudible sigh escaped her lips, sending Jeffrey into an immediate panic.

Especially since he remembered that his ex had left the diner when Karen had excused herself to the restroom.

Could they have run into each other?

"Ahem, um, about when you went to the restroom..."

"I bumped into your ex," Karen finished for him.

There it was. He knew it!

Damn it, they should not have come here!

"She mentioned you two were together for three years, right?" Karen recalled the pride in the other woman's voice.

"Don't listen to her crap! It was a fling, a few months tops. She's my buddy's cousin. We kept running into each other after the split. She insisted on playing the girlfriend card, and I had no way to stop it!"

Karen clicked her tongue. "Hold on, don't think you can gloss over the details."

"What details?"

Leaning back in her seat, she smirked. "Let me guess, you two hooked up again after breaking up, didn't you? Despite saying you've been avoiding her."

Jeffrey felt like Karen had missed her calling as a detective. "Did she tell you that?"

"Not exactly, but when she says three years, and you say a few months, it's obvious that you ended up back in bed at some point during those three years. And in a girl's mind, that means you were together the whole time, just 'on a break' during the fights."

"I was drunk that night! Woke up, saw her, and nearly died of fright." That was no lie; Jeffrey had thought he had snagged a new girl at the bar, what with the dim lights and all. When he woke up and saw her, he ran out so fast his head spun!

He had been dreading her clinginess, and now it was worse than ever.

He tried to give her money afterward, but she would not take it, acting like she would wait for him forever. Jeffrey was terrified, avoiding his regular bar for weeks.

Karen tilted her head, observing him, making him squirm.

"I'm not lying, for real!"

"I'm not saying you are. I'm just wondering when you were drunk and ended up with her, you wore a rubber, right?"

Jeffrey paused, then nodded. "Yeah."

Right?

He must have. That was his rule when playing the field – no risks.

Karen let out a breath and closed her eyes in the passenger seat. "I'm gonna take a quick nap. Wake me when we get there."

"Sure."

At a red light, Jeffrey stole a glance at Karen. He wanted to ask if she was mad or genuinely indifferent. He could not tell.

But if she said she was angry, he would have to sweet-talk her, and if she said she did not care, he would be upset. Would that not mean she did not care about him at all?

It was best not to ask, then. That was the safest bet.

Pulling into the mansion's garage, Jeffrey was about to wake Karen when his phone lit up – a WhatsApp message.

It was from the friend whose birthday party they had left.

[Jeffrey, Paige was looking for you and said it was important to talk in person. Saw your fiancée there, so didn't mention it.]

Paige Taylor, his ex from earlier that evening.

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What good could possibly come from Paige?

Jeffrey meeting up with her? Fat chance!

He swiftly deleted the message on WhatsApp, and after a moment's contemplation, he decided to erase the entire conversation.

Out of sight, out of mind.

"Ugh... are we home?"

Karen stirred from her light doze as she felt the car come to a stop.

"Yeah! I'll carry you inside."

Jeffrey seized every opportunity to show off these days.

Karen did not resist, her eyes sparkling with joy. "Mr. Turner, aren't you being a bit too attentive? If your ex finds out, she'll be green with envy!"

"Can we... not talk about her, please?"

Jeffrey silently vowed never to attend any social gatherings again. They were nothing but trouble.

In the end, Jeffrey carried Karen into the bedroom.

Before she could even kick off her shoes, he was already on her, tugging at her clothes impatiently.

"What are you doing?"

"After dinner at your folks', I've been thinking about how we'd celebrate tonight!" Jeffrey cradled Karen's face in his hands and smirked. "This is the first day your parents acknowledged me. It's got to be commemorated, right?"

"Just hopping into bed counts as commemoration?"

Jeffrey paused, then dropped his voice to a whisper by her ear. "From now on, I won't have to use protection."

Karen's face flushed with alarm. "Absolutely no way!"

"We're getting engaged anyway. If you get pregnant before that, we can just do the engagement and wedding together!"

"No, you're putting it on!" Her tone was firm.

But Jeffrey was stronger, and, in this matter, he called the shots.

As they tumbled into bed, Karen pinched his arm in frustration.

"I don't want kids this soon!"

"But I do. I want a kid like little Langston running around me all day! Beats coveting the Everett's kid."

Just seeing Abigail and Langston with Everett made Jeffrey envious.

"Karen, just give me a kid! Boy or girl, I don't care. I want to be a dad!"

She clenched her teeth, adjusting to his intensity. Though she did not nod in agreement, she did not refuse him either.

Perhaps her parents' approval that day gave Karen a sense of reality about spending her life with Jeffrey. Otherwise, she would not have held much hope for their relationship.

Half-dressed on the bed, the two of them began their bedroom activities.

In the heat of the moment, Jeffrey seemed almost possessed, beyond reason.

Karen winced in pain and tried to escape, but his firm arms pulled her back.

"Be gentle!"

"No, it has to be intense! The deeper, the better, so you can get pregnant sooner!"

Karen did not know how to refute.

After their passionate dance, both were drenched in sweat.

Jeffrey held Karen close, refusing to let go, which led to her biting his arm in frustration.

"Let go, I need to shower!"

She was still in her coat, sticky and uncomfortable.

Jeffrey grunted but did not move.

"Jeffrey!"

"Just wait a bit. I read online that it's better to stay put for a while after. It helps with getting pregnant."

"Get lost!" Karen tried to kick him away, but he caught her ankle, grinning triumphantly.

"Karen..."

She huffed, refusing to engage.

"Karen!"

"If you have something to say, just spit it out. I'm not deaf."

Jeffrey pressed his lips, inching closer to her ear, hesitating before finally speaking, "Your ex-boyfriends... they all used protection, right?"

Karen took a moment to grasp his meaning.

"Nobody's been as much of a jerk as you are!"

"I just thought that would mean I'm the first to fully have you."

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"You're insane! If you're hung up on being someone's first night, why on earth did you come after me?"

Jeffrey could see that Karen was getting ticked off, so he scrambled to explain, "No, no, that's not what I meant! What right do I have to be hung up on anything like that? I'm just... I'm just jealous that they had you before I did! Karen, sometimes I can't even bear to picture it."

Karen remained silent,

"If only I'd met you earlier, like when we were in our teens? Then it would've been just you and me."

Karen snorted. "As if you could give up all your exes with their model figures, curves for days, and those sweet, sultry looks."

The words 'exes' hit Jeffrey like a sucker punch, second only to the blow Heather had dealt him.

“Can we not talk about this anymore?”

“You’re the one who brought up ex-boyfriends.”

“I’m sorry, okay?” Jeffrey flashed a sheepish grin, trying to lighten the mood.

“How about I carry you off to the shower?”

Karen pushed him away. “I can shower on my own, thank you very much. I’m not paralyzed.”

“Still got some fight in you, huh? Then...”

“Get lost!”

...

After two days of stubborn silence, Jonathan was the first to crack.

With the one-month deadline he had given to Dorothy fast approaching and the grandchildren on the cusp of being inducted into the Lopez family, it was crucial to change their surnames to avoid any snickers or side-eye.

He reached out to Everett, but when the call went unanswered, he was left to send a message.

[Send someone to escort Heather over, and let’s keep this between us, alright? Don't tell your mother!]

Jonathan had not actually consulted his wife because he figured it would only lead to more hassle. It was simpler to ask forgiveness than permission, especially since Heather was currently under his control.

If his son ended up offing her, his wife would probably throw a fit, sure, but it would not amount to much.

Everett saw the message and immediately had Kevin arrange for someone to handle it.

Dorothy just wanted evidence, right? She wanted to go through the proper legal channels to ensure Heather faced justice.

He understood and was willing to make it happen.

“Karen says that Jeffrey is now officially the future son-in-law of her family.”

Dorothy was beaming as she looked at her phone, a rare sight.

“It looks like wedding bells are in the air?”

“Seems like it.” Dorothy nodded, genuinely happy for Karen. It was heartwarming to see her friend about to settle down, especially with a guy as drool-worthy as Jeffrey. “She said they're getting engaged first, then married. Her folks aren't ready to let their baby girl go just yet.”

Everett reached out and gently tousled her hair. “By the time they get engaged, I should be able to leave Swevia Country for good.”

He would not miss Jeffrey's engagement party for the world.

Dorothy was momentarily taken aback, looking up at him.

Counting the days, there was not much time left. Unless Karen was planning to get engaged within the next few days.

Sensing her unease, Everett stayed calm for once and simply smiled.

“Dorothy, just go for it. Chase the justice you're after. I've got your back.”

Dorothy did not reply.

“Smooth out that frown. I like it when you smile.” Everett thought she was worried about gathering evidence, fearing that his mother might interfere and protect Heather from prosecution.

“Everett...”

“Whatever you need, I'll make sure you have it.”

He twirled a lock of her hair around his finger, an intimate and suggestive gesture.

Dorothy furrowed her brow slightly. “Have you... been meddling in the investigation into my mother's death?”

“Yeah, I've got the death certificate. It says your mother died from a sudden heart attack.”

“There must have been something that set her off, something that someone said!”

Everett took her suddenly cold hand and warmed it in his. “Do you trust me, Dorothy?”