

Midnight 691

Chapter 691

"Whatever, I don't care," Jefferey said with a dismissive wave.

All that mattered was that Karen's kids didn't hold a grudge against him. Everything else was trivial.

Jeffrey, a fixture in high society, knew the drill about out-of-wedlock children—it was more common than not. People hardly batted an eye anymore.

He had just one; heck, there were families out there with seven or eight. Was he expected to painstakingly raise every single love child?

"You seriously don't give a damn about our daughter? She's your own flesh and blood."

"You had her without my consent, and now you're trying to force me to give her fatherly love? What a joke," Jeffrey said with frustration. Just the thought of this unexpected child was enough to give him a headache, let alone any feelings of affection.

Ever since he found out, Jeffrey couldn't help but think about Karen's reaction.

"You can deny her all you want, but she's still your daughter. Jeffrey, I want you entangled with me for life. I want that woman to feel the thorn in her side forever."

"Do I look like a pushover to you, Paige?" Jeffrey's voice was cold as he stepped closer to her.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Don't test my limits. If Karen leaves me because of this, I don't know what I'll do. Maybe I can make sure you and the kid disappear."

Paige trembled, her skin breaking out in goosebumps.

"You would disown your own daughter for a woman?"

"With a mother so desperate, I can't expect much from the kid. I couldn't care less."

"Jeffrey, you've lost your mind."

He scoffed, straightening his suit jacket. "I'll let you know when to get the DNA test. Don't try any tricks. Think about it—if this gets out, we both lose. But at worst, I lose a fiancée. You, on the other hand, stand to lose much more."

Silence.

"If the test proves she's mine, hand her over. I'll pay you off, and you can take the money and never come back to Eldorria City." he paused, "If she's not..."

He had made it clear. He'd show no mercy to a liar.

"She's yours. I've never been with another man. You could kill me, and my story won't change. I just underestimated how cold you are. I thought you'd be kinder for our child's sake. Instead, you want to take her away."

"Take her away?" Jeffrey laughed bitterly. "Wasn't it you who came to me, desperate? Don't flatter yourself, thinking I want to bring her into the Turner family. She doesn't deserve it. I just don't want to be controlled, that's all."

Paige couldn't imagine her daughter taken away from her, and what might happen.

"Your fiancée is no saint. She'd never treat my child right."

"You're worrying about the wrong things," Jeffrey said sternly, looking down on her. "Think about it— your family's chain of hotels could collapse overnight because of this. Your Taylor family will pay dearly for stealing my seed."

"This has nothing to do with my parents. They don't even know about the child."

"So, stay away from Karen. If she breaks up with me, I'll make sure the Taylor family regrets it as much as I do."

Chapter 692

Jeffrey had always been a free spirit, a daredevil with little regard for the rules that seemed to bind everyone else. His parents had long given up on trying to rein him in.

But there was one person who could keep him in line—Karen. And for everyone's sake, it was crucial that she stuck around.

...

When Everett came to, Dorothy was sitting by his bedside, her grip on his hand just as tight as it had been when he'd drifted off. His body had finally returned to a normal temperature.

"You're awake," Dorothy breathed out, the weight of her worry lifting as she saw his eyes open.

If he hadn't come around soon, she was ready to call for Dr. Quincy to take a look at him.

"Mmhhh." Everett's gaze fell as he gently withdrew his hand, then propped himself up and swung his legs off the bed.

His cold demeanor left Dorothy feeling out of sorts.

"Everett! Abigail and Langston are waiting for you, are you up for it?"

"I'll go."

He paused, his silhouette framed by the doorway, then added, "I've got a confidential meeting for my company."

Dorothy's face flickered with confusion before understanding dawned, and she rose from her seat, "I see. I'll go to see them for now. Just catch up with me when you're done."

"Will do."

Everett didn't dare look at her again.

Waking up meant the dream was over. It was time to get back to business.

After Dorothy left, Everett stood motionless for a long time before finally reaching for his phone and dialing a number.

The call connected quickly.

"Mr. Lopez calling me. That's a first." Byte 7's voice was unusually sharp, devoid of its typical laziness but laced with sarcasm that grated on the nerves.

"The USB that Dorothy asked you to recover, is it done?"

"Client confidentiality, Everett," Byte 7 teased.

"Send it to me."

Byte 7 was taken aback by Everett's abrupt and direct demand.

"How could I possibly hand that over to you?"

"Name your price."

"It's not about the money." Byte 7 shot back. "Everett, you know what's on that video, don't you? Have you figured out the content? That's impossible."

Everett pursed his lips, his brows furrowing as he repeated firmly, "Give it to me. I'd rather not get my hands dirty."

"You want to destroy the video?"

"If you don't want your precious core system, years in the making, to go up in smoke, you'll comply."

Byte 7 laughed mockingly, "Do you even know where my server is? Good luck trying to destroy—"

"Azure Bay. Need me to send you the coordinates?"

"Dang it!" Byte 7 exploded, his usual nonchalance evaporating as his voice pitched higher, "Everett, you play dirty! Have you been watching me all this time?"

He thought his server was hidden well enough, but Everett had found it.

"One hour. Send me the recovered video. I'll have someone pick up the USB."

This wasn't a negotiation—it was an order.

"No way. That's Dorothy's property. I can't give it to you. If you want it, tell Dorothy to come and get it herself. I'll hand it over to her."

But then Byte 7 screamed in panic.

"Don't you dare touch my server!"

Everett's voice was emotionless, "You have 59 minutes before your system disappears from this world."

"Everett! You claim to love Dorothy, right? Seems like a facade now. In the end, you're just trying to destroy evidence Dorothy worked so hard to find, all to protect your mother from her crimes. She's only seeking justice, an eye for an eye. What's wrong with that?"

Everett didn't respond to Byte 7's accusation. Instead, he simply said, "58 minutes left."

Chapter 693

On the other end of the line, Byte 7 watched helplessly as his screen initiated the system's self-destruct sequence, ticking up from 1% to 2%.

Each increment represented a night's worth of his hard work.

"It's over," Everett said, his voice detached, as chilly as a winter breeze.

"Wait a second." Byte 7 shouted desperately. "I'll give it to you, just stop."

Satisfied with the response, Everett pressed the pause button on his own computer.

Byte 7 thought he was the king of the cyber world, but he was about to learn a tough lesson — there's always a bigger fish.

"Everett, can you tell me how you managed to track down my server?"

"You want to mentor my son, Langston. That requires my approval."

"The laptop I gave Langston might have been compromised by your virus, but at the end of the day, it's my laptop."

And his son, Langston, was ultimately his own.

After hanging up, Everett opened his computer's main screen.

Byte 7 sent over a video file shortly after.

Just from the blurred figure on the thumbnail, Everett didn't need to watch the video to know the content.

Heather hadn't lied.

She, and indeed they, were all involved.

Everett closed his eyes and sat in silence for a long while before slowly opening them again.

Byte 7 sent another message. [The fairness Dorothy asks for isn't unreasonable. You can't do what you want to do just because the culprit is your mother.]

He raised his hand and lightly tapped the keyboard.

[My family, my business. Not yours.]

Everett's fingers hesitated over the keyboard for a moment before a pop-up window appeared on the screen.

[Are you sure you want to permanently delete this file?]

He looked down and without a moment's hesitation, clicked confirm.

...

"Mummy! Langston took me to the backyard to play this morning and accidentally made me fall. He didn't even say sorry." Abigail complained, her cute demeanor belying her stubborn nature.

Sometimes Dorothy wondered if her daughter took after Everett or herself.

"You said it was an accident."

"So he just needs to apologize, and I'll forgive him. But if he doesn't, I'll stay mad."

Dorothy sighed and glanced at Langston, who was still engrossed in his computer.

"Did you hear that?"

"She's the one who wanted to run. She didn't tell you that when she fell, she dragged me down with her." Langston set aside his laptop and showed his knee to his mom. "See, now you know why I didn't apologize."

Dorothy frowned and pulled Abigail to her side.

"Abigail, you can't abuse your favoritism to wrong others. Understand?"

"But I apologized to Langston right away. He's the one who didn't say sorry." Abigail's big eyes blinked back tears, her face the picture of innocence.

"Girls always making a fuss," Langston scoffed as he stood up and approached her. "Sorry, okay? Are we good now?"

Immediately, Abigail nodded, her tears turning to laughter. "I forgive you, Langston."

Dorothy truly understood the meaning of 'a judge at home faces the hardest cases.'

Suddenly, the laptop Langston had left on the couch went dark.

Instinctively, he dashed back to hit the restore keys, but it was no use.

"Mummy, where's Daddy? I need him to look at this."

"Daddy's in a meeting, very busy. You can't disturb him."

"But my laptop's broken." Langston clutched her hand, about to plead further.

That was when Dorothy's phone rang.

Chapter 694

"Go play for a bit, kids, Mommy's got to take a call. Langston, Daddy will join you soon after he wraps up his work, be a good boy."

Despite his impatience, Langston managed only a nod.

"Alright."

Dorothy stepped out of the children's room, cell phone in hand, and answered the call.

"Hello? Byte 7."

"Everett's got hold of the video from your flash drive. He hacked into my computer. If I'm not mistaken, he's destroyed the evidence."

"What?!"

Dorothy felt her mind go blank.

A buzzing noise filled her ears.

"You need to confront Everett. He's probably trying to protect his mom, ensuring your evidence is gone for good."

"Dorothy, hello? Dorothy! Are you listening?"

"I... I'm here." She steadied herself against the wall to remain upright. "Are you sure he knew what was on the flash drive, and it wasn't just out of jealousy that he took it from you?"

She didn't want to wrongfully accuse Everett.

So she needed to be certain.

"He knew. Dorothy, he knew everything."

Those words echoed in Dorothy's head, playing over and over.

Suddenly, she ended the call and hurried toward the hospital room.

It all made sense now.

No wonder Everett had been acting so odd, repeatedly apologizing.

No wonder Everett, who never used to hold meetings without her, suddenly claimed today's was confidential.

Too many things added up.

Dorothy pushed on the hospital room door, which was locked from the inside.

She knocked forcefully, "Everett, open up!"

He wasn't hiding; he quickly came and unlocked the door.

Their eyes met in an instant.

Everett was wearing the silk robe she had picked out for him, the sash tied casually at his waist, lending a touch of indolence to his usual stoic demeanor.

The day they had reunited after years apart, he had stood before her just like this, his eyes heavy with unspoken thoughts.

But things were different now.

"Everett, where's the video?"

Dorothy felt her voice didn't sound like her own as she asked the question.

His lips parted slightly, and he stepped aside, as if to let her in first to talk.

But Dorothy wouldn't budge an inch.

"I'm asking you, where's the video you took from Byte 7? Everett!"

"It's gone."

Dorothy's gaze snapped up to meet his. "Say that again!"

"Were you planning to use that video to send my mom and Heather to jail?"

Everett's voice was a hoarse whisper, as if coming from deep within his chest, trembling slightly.

"Yes!" Now that it was all out in the open, Dorothy didn't hold back. "I've long suspected that your mother was the mastermind behind my own mother's death. You saw that video, you should know ___"

"I should know what?" Everett cut her off harshly. "I should know that while I've been carefully planning our future, you've been plotting how to leave me? Counting the days until you can walk away, is that it? Dorothy, have you ever considered me? Even just a little bit?"

Her fists clenched so tightly that her knuckles shook.

"No, I only want the truth." Dorothy gritted her teeth. "Give me the video."

Everett closed his eyes, forcing down the surge of emotions.

"I told you, it's destroyed."

Chapter 695

"No, Everett! That was my last shot. Do you want me to die?!"

She clutched at Everett's shirt collar with a manic desperation, biting down hard and pounding at him with her fists.

Everett didn't flinch, not so much as a furrow in his brow, as he let her vent her fury.

Gradually, Dorothy's strength ebbed away.

"Everett, my mom didn't do anything wrong. Why was she the one to get killed. It should have been me. Why didn't your mom just finish the job and take me out too. Everett, since you could erase the video, can you just erase me too? I'm so tired, I'm really just so tired."

Tears brimmed and spilled over, streaking down her cheeks.

Everett lifted a hand, gently wiping them away.

But the tears wouldn't stop, so he kept wiping them one by one, as if this simple act could make her stop crying.

"Dorothy, have you ever actually trusted me? You had your mind made up, didn't you? Ready to stand against me the moment you got the evidence, to raise your banner in defiance and cast me as your enemy."

Everett couldn't understand.

Why could he never earn Dorothy's trust.

"I—"

"Dorothy," Everett interrupted softly, "How many days left of your appointment with my dad?"

"Three days."

"Okay." He let out a sigh, stepping back to put some distance between them, "After these last three days, I'll let you go."

Everett had accepted it.

He couldn't hold on, or maybe he never really had a grip to begin with.

"But the video..."

"Byte 7 only recovered a fragment, and I bet he made demands in exchange for the full thing, right? In three days, I'll give you the whole video." Everett's lashes lowered, concealing all his emotions, "Including Heather's confession."

Dorothy stared at him in shock.

"You said you destroyed it?"

"My mom is no fool. The video Byte 7 recovered has a self-destruct code and comes with a virus that infects the restorer's computer. Heather and my mom set it up that way on purpose, so there's no way it would survive until you got it to court."

By then, Dorothy would be a laughing stock.

Every shred of evidence would vanish in an instant, leaving her with nothing to present in court.

Everett had copied the video earlier and then deeply destroyed it, wiping out the tracing code as well, which meant the virus-infected computer belonging to Langston also went dark, and Byte 7's wasn't spared either.

Dorothy never dreamed it would be like this.

But why didn't Everett just say so from the start?

He was deliberately testing her.

He wanted to know how she would handle this situation, and he wanted to see where she would place him once the dust settled.

"You said Abigail and Langston wanted me to play with them, right? I should go."

Everett's voice was hoarse as he spoke, then turned to leave.

Dorothy reached out instinctively to grab his robe, but the silky fabric slipped right through her fingers.

Everett's silhouette was still tall and imposing, yet tinged with a profound loneliness.

Dorothy's phone continued to ring. It must be Byte 7, because his computer, just like Langston's, had crashed completely.

It was absurd, really. She had allowed herself to be swayed by the words of Byte 7, a person she hardly knew, to confront Everett.

Everett had every right to be heartbroken.

Chapter 696

After wrapping up a grueling meeting, Jeffrey snatched his car keys and hurried downstairs, intent on picking up Karen.

As he neared the villa, his cell phone rang.

A quick glance, a curse under his breath.

"Damn it!"

The woman was like a bad penny.

He pulled over to the curb and answered the call.

"What now?"

"Jeffrey." Paige's voice was a choked sob, her throat raw, "Our girl, she's in the hospital, you need to come, now."

Jeffrey's brow furrowed, "I'm not going."

"I didn't tell you before, but she has a congenital heart defect. She could die at any time. Please, just come see her. The doctors say it's serious, they're afraid she won't make it through the surgery."

"I said, I'm not coming."

With that, Jeffrey hung up.

But he didn't start the car right away. Instead, he grabbed his pack of cigarettes, tapped it, pulled one out, and lit it with a flick of his lighter.

What a day from hell.

He finished his cigarette, flicking it out the car window.

Turning the ignition, he continued toward the villa, but then slammed on the brakes, grabbed his phone, and called Karen.

"Hey?"

Karen's end was quiet, just the sound of keyboard clacking.

"I, uh, got caught up with an unexpected meeting at work, no clue when it'll wrap up. Order something for yourself; don't wait up for me."

"What?" Karen grumbled, "I've been waiting for you since morning. I'm starving."

"Sorry, babe, it's out of my hands. Everett's not around, so I have to step up. Just eat something, or I can order for you, and have it delivered. How about seafood?"

"No way. I'm watching my figure. Just something simple will do. You focus on work. I was just teasing. I'll finish up here and pop over to the supermarket. I won't starve."

Jeffrey bit his lip, his voice tinged with guilt, "Alright."

Karen added, "Wait! Any idea when you might be back? If it's late, I might swing by my cousin's. You know how he's been stewing. Mom says he's been holed up in his room, and she told me to check on him."

"Because of us?"

"Of course not!"

"Because of Dorothy?"

"Ugh, he knows he can't compete with Everett, and he's just being stubborn."

"Okay, then go. You can take any car from the garage. Don't bother with cabs; they're not safe."

"Got it."

With that, Karen ended the call.

Jeffrey ran his fingers through his hair in frustration before texting Paige.

[Which hospital?]

...

Karen tidied up and headed straight for Kenneth's place.

Surely he'd have food, and she couldn't be bothered to shop.

She parked at the downstairs of Kenneth's building and dashed up the stairs.

Knock after knock, but no answer.

"Kenneth, open up. It's me, Karen."

With no response, she wondered if Kenneth had stepped out.

As she reached for her phone, faint footsteps echoed from within.

The door swung open, revealing Kenneth's ghostly pale face, his lips drained of color.

"Bro! What's wrong with you?!"

Kenneth tried to brush it off as nothing, then collapsed.

Karen quickly dialed 911.

Chapter 697

Afraid of being too busy alone at the hospital, after notifying the hospital, Karen called her parents.

The ambulance arrived in no time.

Paramedics jumped out and swiftly loaded Kenneth onto a stretcher.

"Bro, you better not scare me like this!" Karen's voice quivered, her hands trembling uncontrollably.

To Karen, Kenneth was more than a cousin; he was her brother.

Once at the hospital, doctors whisked him away into the ER for a battery of tests.

Karen settled the bills but couldn't follow him in; she was left to wait on a hard plastic bench for her parents to arrive. In the tense interim, she shot a text to Jeffrey.

[Hey, you busy?]

Suddenly, she yearned for Jeffrey's comforting presence.

The image of Kenneth's pallid face had sent her into a panic, her heart still pounding in her chest.

Jeffrey texted back quickly: [Yeah, swamped at the office. Hang tight, babe. I'll try to head out soon and be there for you.]

Karen bit her lip, deciding against spilling her fears.

Jeffrey was buried in work, and she shouldn't always disrupt him, especially with the Lopez Corporation's multi-million, sometimes billion-dollar deals on the line. She wouldn't let her crisis hinder his career.

"Karen!"

It was her dad, Derek, who arrived first. He scanned the room and hurried over upon spotting his daughter.

"Dad."

"How's Kenneth? I just got off the phone with your aunt and uncle. They're on their way from Eldorria City, but it might take them a while to get here."

Karen looked up, her eyes brimming with tears, "They took him straight into the ER as soon as we got here. I have no idea what's going on. But he looked so scary just now."

"There, there, it's gonna be okay. Dad's here." Derek soothed her, patting her back. "Kenneth's gonna be fine, I promise."

She nodded vigorously, tears flowing freely once she was in her father's embrace.

"Where's Jeffrey? Didn't he come with you?"

"He's got a lot on his plate at work today, so I didn't tell him."

"Right. Don't make him skip work for every little thing. It's not easy working at a big corporation like that; must be exhausting."

Karen nodded, "Don't worry, Dad. I'm grown up now."

"Stop crying, kiddo." Derek handed her a tissue. "I'm here now, and your mom will be here any minute. She was picking up groceries at the market. I couldn't wait for her; I was afraid you'd be here all alone, so I took a cab."

"I'm gonna step outside for some air. I'll be right back."

Karen needed a break; her eyes were sore from crying, and she felt a tightness in her chest that made it hard to breathe.

Luckily, the ER was on the ground floor, just a few steps from the fresh air she craved.

"Go on, then. Wipe your eyes," Derek said, passing her the tissues.

Karen rose and walked out, the breeze bringing some relief.

She pulled out her phone, considering a quick reply to Jeffrey to avoid his usual complaints about her slow responses.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, Karen spotted a car that seemed oddly familiar.

She squinted for a closer look.

Truth be told, mistaking Jeffrey's car was a tall order. It was a limited edition sports model, the kind only someone as flashy as Jeffrey would fancy.

But why would it be here at the hospital?

Shouldn't it be parked at the Lopez Corporation parking lot?

Karen paused, snapped a photo with her phone, and sent it to Jeffrey on WhatsApp.

[I see your car. Are you at the hospital?]

After nearly a minute, there was still no response from Jeffrey.

Chapter 698

Was it really so crazy busy that there wasn't even a second to check a text message?

Karen's gut reaction was that Jeffrey must've lent his car out to someone else.

Truth be told, she had a lot of trust in this guy.

Sure, they'd had their share of squabbles, and before they got together, even their bickering could get as sharp as needles, but Jeffrey was always upfront about his messes—never one to hide his tracks. So the last thing she wanted was to be the paranoid type.

Thinking her cousin might have some news by now, she quickly pocketed her phone and turned back to the ER.

Serena had shown up too. Since she was getting on in years, hospitals gave her the creeps.

"Karen, your cousin still got a thing for your friend or what?"

"Umm."

"He's beating himself up over her, isn't he?" Serena had a knack for reading between the lines, and the situation was as clear as day to her.

Dorothy had just returned from abroad and then left again, taking both her kids with her. It was only natural for Kenneth to be acting this way.

"Mom, Dorothy never gave Kenneth an inch. It's always been Everett for her. It's Kenneth who couldn't let go."

Karen still can't help but put in a good word for her bestie, lest when Aunt and Uncle come by later and see their son like this, they might blame it all on Dorothy.

"Ah, Kenneth's always been head over heels. His folks have been on his case, but to no avail. Blind dates? He'd bail. Work? He'd just hover around your friend. And now? She's off living the dream, and Kenneth's left in the dust."

"Mom."

"Alright, alright, I'm not blaming anyone. Just stating the facts."

Karen bit her lip; she was in quite the awkward spot.

When she'd introduced Kenneth to Dorothy, how could she have known Dorothy was already with Everett? And that Everett had been biding his time.

Seeing Kenneth like this cut her deep too.

Soon enough, a doctor emerged from the ER. "Family of Kenneth?"

"Here, doctor, over here."

Karen, quick on her feet, dashed over. "How's Kenneth?"

"Just weak from not eating and staying cooped up; low blood sugar and blood pressure. He can't go on like this; it's taking a toll on his body. We'll move him to a regular room. Give him a talking to, will you? Starvation is no solution to problems." After giving details on the room, the doctor left.

Before long, Kenneth was wheeled out.

"Bro, thank god you're okay."

Kenneth, looking a tad embarrassed, just tugged at his chapped lips. "Sorry for worrying you."

"Don't say that. We are family."

As two nurses began to wheel Kenneth to his room for observation, Karen reached out to help, but her phone rang.

It was Jeffrey.

Talk about timing.

After a moment's hesitation, she didn't reach out to push the gurney but instead took a step back and answered the call.

"Hello?"

"How could you see my car? Are you at the hospital?" Jeffrey sounded frantic.

Karen frowned. "You're here too?"

His immediate question made it clear: he hadn't lent his car out; he'd driven it himself.

"Yeah, a friend's sick. Just stopped by to check."

"Jeffrey, I thought you said you were swamped at the office?" Karen's tone was less than pleased.

Here she was, not even wanting to bother him, and there he was, at the hospital for someone else.

"Don't get mad. I'm heading back soon."

"Just tell me, this friend of yours – a guy or a girl?" Karen paused, then huffed, "It's a girl, isn't it?"

Chapter 699

Karen wasn't one for wild theories, but if a guy had been admitted to the hospital, there was no way Jeffrey would've kept it a secret from her.

Typically, Jeffrey was the kind who'd give her a play-by-play of his day, down to his bathroom breaks. But today, he'd darted off to the hospital without a peep. Heck, just earlier, she couldn't reach him at all.

That could only mean one thing: he was there with a woman.

A woman?

Her brows knit together in sudden concern. "It's not your ex, is it?"

"No! It's not her." Jeffrey blurted out so fast it was as if he didn't even pause to think. Worried he might spill more beans, he quickly added, "I'll be back at the office soon. I'll explain everything when I get home tonight, promise. Gotta run, sweetheart."

"But, you—"

Before Karen could finish, the call ended, leaving her staring at her phone, a mixture of annoyance and confusion stirring within.

Just then, Serena called out, breaking her reverie. "Karen, what are you zoning out for? Come on, we need your help with your brother."

"On my way."

...

Jeffrey caught a glimpse of the little girl.

She was just over a year old, slender and pale, sleeping peacefully in her hospital bed.

He didn't dare look too long—just one glance and he stepped out of the room.

Paige was there, her eyes red and puffy from crying, her breaths coming in short, jagged pulls.

"How much does her treatment cost?" Jeffrey asked, his voice low, not even wanting to look at Paige.

"It's not much. But I'm afraid that she might not make it."

He paused, then pulled out a card and handed it to her. "There should be over five million on this. Use it for her treatment; I'll cover the cost."

Paige was stunned, a flicker of surprise in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"You're acknowledging her as yours?"

"I'm not," Jeffrey said coldly, pushing the card into her hand. "I need to leave. Karen suspects I'm at the hospital. I have to get back."

He turned to go, but Paige caught his arm. "Jeffrey, have you no heart? Your daughter is fighting for her life, and you're just going to leave?"

"I said I'd pay for the treatment; what more do you want?"

"At least stay with her through this tough time," Paige retorted, uncharacteristically firm. "You showing up today proves you care about your child, even if just a little. So why do you rush back when that woman calls? Is she more important than your own daughter?"

"We haven't done a DNA test yet. I can't be sure she's mine."

"Jeffrey! You bastard. How can you say such things?" Paige yelled, hysteria edging into her voice. "If you never cared about me, why did you get involved with me in the first place? Why did you deceive me, and make me fall for you? You think you're innocent? Am I not innocent too?"

Jeffrey had no idea that one night with her would lead to all this mess.

If he had known, he would've never gotten entangled with her, not in the slightest.

"Just one day, okay?" Paige's voice softened as she pleaded with him. "The doctor says we'll know by today whether she can go through with the surgery. I can't handle this alone. Just stay with me in the hospital for one day."

Jeffrey would've preferred her yelling, making a scene.

But this kind of humble begging was hard for him to outright refuse.

"I told her I'd be home."

"Just say you're out playing pool or grabbing a drink with the guys. Isn't that what you used to tell me? You never hesitated to blow me off."

"If you want a DNA test, let's do it. We're in the hospital right now. Let's get it over with."

Chapter 700

Her certainty threw Jeffrey for a loop.

"Looks like she really is mine."

"I don't need you to believe me, just go get a paternity test," Paige said, her eyes slightly downcast. "Since you're worried I'm scamming you, just get the test. I was angry back then not because I had something to hide, but because it's so unfair to our daughter."

"You should've told me when you were pregnant."

Waiting until after the baby was born, who can handle that?

"If I had told you, would you have stuck around?"

"But you're hurting her now. By having her born into a world where she can't grow up in a complete family, it's irresponsible to her, and to you."

And it put him in a bind.

If he had never met the child, maybe things would be different.

But once he saw her, indifference was no longer an option.

Jeffrey had always liked Abigail and Langston. And he wanted his own child. Now suddenly he had a daughter over a year old. What was he supposed to do?

"But I love you, Jeffrey. If you hadn't told me you were a bachelor for life, and you didn't want kids, maybe I would have spoken up. But I was afraid you'd force me to get an abortion.

Just spend one day with your daughter, okay? That way, if she doesn't make it, and she passes away, then you and I can lay this to rest. I won't bother you anymore, I'm tired too."

Jeffrey clenched his jaw, finally grunting an affirmative.

The messy bond between him and Paige could be debated and scrutinized, but in the end, the child was innocent.

"Let's go." Paige reached out to the wall for support, her walk labored.

"Where to?"

"Paternity test," she answered. "I checked. If we pay extra for a rush, we can get the results in three hours."

"Let's just do it, so I can prove my innocence."

This wasn't just about the bloodline of the child anymore, it was about proving her sincerity and the years of waiting.

Jeffrey watched her struggle, then strode over and took her arm, "No need."

Paige looked up at him.

"No need for the test. Let's go back to the child."

As for Karen, he needed to think carefully about what to do next.

...

Langston's computer was a no-go.

So Everett had a new one delivered.

Kids being kids. Langston lit up with a new toy, "Thanks, Dad, I'll go show off my new laptop to my mentor."

"You might not be able to reach him for a while."

Because while Everett could replace Langston's computer, the one from Byte 7 was another story.

"Huh?"

"If you want to learn something, just tell me, I'll teach you."

Langston raised an eyebrow, skeptical, "You're better than my mentor?"

Everett, resigned, "You can give it a shot."

"Then why couldn't you fix the old laptop? If my mentor were here—"

"Why do you think he's unreachable now?"

Langston was confused, but he sensed an underlying message in his father's words.

Everett stayed with them until it got dark and Abigail and Langston were exhausted. Only then did he leave.

But Everett didn't head straight back to the hospital room; instead, he took a walk outside.

It wasn't that Everett didn't want to see Dorothy, it was just that he was afraid to face her.

In the span of one evening, all the plans for a bright future had collapsed, and that was something no one could easily accept.