

Midnight 701

Chapter 701

Everett finally understood why Dorothy wouldn't allow him to attend her mother's memorial.

Indeed. He had no right to be there.

That place was forever beyond his worth.

He knew what he needed to do now was to help Dorothy leave the confines of Swevia County, and pursue the life she was meant to lead, but there were only three days left. The final three days.

Call him selfish or hypocritical, Everett had given himself this last deadline.

When Dorothy found him, he was sitting on the hospital steps, lost in thought.

The evening air was still crisp, and a gentle breeze played with the hem of his silk pajama top, which glinted in the pale moonlight.

She didn't disturb him, just quietly took a seat on a nearby bench.

Perhaps, they both needed this moment of calm.

Time ticked slowly by until Dorothy felt the chill, rubbing her arms for warmth.

That was when Everett spoke without even looking back, "You should go inside."

"I'll sit for a while longer, then I'll head back in."

He knew she was there? But he hadn't glanced her way, not once.

Dorothy pressed her lips together, remaining seated on the cold marble bench.

As the night grew darker and colder, the stone beneath her seemed to freeze.

Usually, by this time, Everett would have stood up and urged her to come inside, nagging her a little in the process.

But now, he remained motionless.

A minute later, Everett finally got up.

Just as Dorothy thought he was coming over to escort her inside, he walked straight past her without a second's glance.

She didn't get even a half-second of eye contact.

Dorothy hadn't anticipated things turning out this way, nor had she expected Everett to use a video as a test.

He must be disappointed now.

But the truth he had uncovered was indisputable, and she had nothing to argue against it.

She followed him back to the ward, keeping a not-too-close, not-too-distant gap between them, but they did not walk side by side.

As they neared the room, Everett pushed the door open and entered without looking back to see if she was following.

Dorothy paused, her phone ringing at that moment.

Looking down, she saw it was Karen.

"Hey, Dorothy, Kenneth's in the hospital."

"What happened to Kenneth?"

"After you and Everett left, he locked himself up at home and refused to eat. If I hadn't shown up today, he might have starved himself." Karen sighed heavily. "I know I shouldn't be calling you about this, but can you talk some sense into him? My aunt and uncle are beside themselves with worry, and I—"

Karen was clearly at her wit's end.

Dorothy frowned slightly and took a deep breath, "Pass him the phone."

Before she could say more, she heard Kenneth's voice through the speaker.

"Didn't I say not to call her. She's got enough on her plate, and if she's bothered by my problems, she'll hate me. Mom, Dad, can you please not meddle in my affairs?"

"Bro, Dorothy wants to talk to you."

"Hang up. I want you to hang up now. Otherwise, I'll pull out these IVs and go home."

Soon after, Karen's voice came through again, "Dorothy, I'm really at my wit's end with him."

Dorothy sighed, "Tell him I could never hate him, not to overthink things."

"Alright. You take care of yourself. We'll talk when you get back."

"Okay."

After ending the call, Dorothy pocketed her phone and turned to walk away, but then she noticed the door to the ward seemed to move slightly.

As she approached, however, there was no one there.

Inside, Everett was already seated at his desk, head lowered, scrutinizing a contract.

Chapter 702

Dorothy stepped into the room, clutching her clothes, and headed for the bathroom to change.

She had felt a sudden awkwardness, wanting to say something to him, yet uncertain about what words would be fitting.

Emerging from the bathroom, she found Everett still engrossed in his work.

Resuming her usual routine, Dorothy settled onto the couch to quietly observe Everett at his office tasks.

The ping of a WhatsApp notification interrupted her gaze.

Looking down, she saw a message from Kenneth.

[Sorry Dorothy, I'm just not in the mood to eat. It has nothing to do with you! I didn't expect my parents to hassle Karen into calling you, sorry for the disturbance. Don't be mad.]

Dorothy could almost see the anxious expression on Kenneth's face as he typed.

But she wasn't mad.

In fact, she could even understand why Kenneth's parents had pushed Karen to call her. Everyone loves their children, and seeing their son like this, his parents must be hurting too.

She texted back: [Kenneth, don't be so hard on yourself. I'm not upset, just focus on getting better.]

This time, Kenneth didn't reply with text but with a voice message.

Dorothy glanced at Everett and chose to convert the voice to text.

[They insist that I'm fasting because of you, but no matter what I say, they won't listen! I know the truth; it was because I missed the kids.]

Dorothy grasped this even more profoundly. She was fully aware of Kenneth's deep commitment to the two kids.

Just as she was about to reply, he sent another voice message, this one only a second long.

In an attempt to convert it, she accidentally hit play due to its brevity.

Kenneth's voice, a bit hoarse but still tender, filled the spacious room.

"I miss you too."

Dorothy wished she could throw her phone away.

Without even looking up, she could feel Everett's gaze piercing through her, as if her head was about to start smoking.

Kenneth's words, "I miss you too," carried an unexpectedly intimate undertone. It almost implied that her prior message must have been, "I miss you," prompting his response of, "I miss you too."

"Uh, I..."

Before Dorothy could get the words out, Everett had already risen from his desk.

Just as she thought he was coming over to her, Everett abruptly turned and entered the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

In less than half a minute, the sound of the shower began.

He was taking a shower!

But he hadn't even heard her explanation!

Dorothy quickly slipped on her slippers and approached the bathroom door, calling out, "Everett, that voice message isn't what you think!"

The sound of water continued unabated, and after a long pause, his voice finally responded.

"It's none of my business. I don't want to hear it."

Dorothy was at a loss for words, his aloof tone making her feel somewhat snubbed.

"Fine, if you don't want to listen, then don't."

She didn't feel like explaining anyway!

Returning to the bed, Dorothy shoved her phone under her pillow and forced her eyes shut, attempting to coerce herself to sleep.

She had thought she'd be too agitated to drift off, but the day's emotional highs and lows had sapped her strength. As she listened to the sound of the shower, Dorothy unexpectedly slipped into slumber.

When Everett came out, Dorothy was already in a deep slumber.

He approached the bedside, pausing for nearly a minute, then waved his hand in front of her face.

No reaction.

Once he was sure she was really asleep, Everett's gaze deepened as he scanned over to her side.

Where had Dorothy put her phone?

Chapter 703

With the sun, Dorothy arose the next day, her eyes fluttering open before Everett's for a change.

Propping herself up on her elbow, she gazed adoringly at his sleeping face. Even in slumber, he radiated a chiseled tranquility, the usual frost of aloofness melting away to unveil a softer side. Tousled hair added a boyish charm, reminiscent of a high school jock ready to hit the field for a game of hoops at a moment's notice.

Not wanting to let this rare moment slip by, Dorothy instinctively reached under her pillow for her phone to capture the scene. But after fumbling around, her phone was nowhere to be found. She could have sworn she placed it there before drifting off to sleep.

Frustrated with her unsuccessful search, she flipped the pillow entirely, only to come up empty-handed. The commotion was enough to stir Everett from his dreams.

When she looked back at him, his eyes were already open, watching her.

"What are you looking for?" he asked, his voice husky with the remnants of sleep, a deep and enticing timbre to his morning rasp.

"My phone's gone missing."

There was silence as Everett didn't respond but instead got out of bed. Dorothy's eyes fell upon her phone as he walked away, charging on the desk.

Oh? Had she plugged it in last night before going to bed?

She slapped her forehead, unable to recall, and decided to let it go.

Expecting Everett to still be in no mood for conversation, Dorothy was surprised to find him fresh from the shower, dressed and ready, waiting at the door as she finished getting dressed.

"Let's go," he said.

"Where?"

"I promised Abigail and Langston we'd take them to the amusement park today."

Dorothy blinked in surprise, unaware of these plans.

"I'll pick up the kids. Meet me downstairs," he said, leaving the room without waiting for her agreement.

She paused, reflecting on Everett's words from the day before, "After these three days, you're free to go."

It seemed Everett had shifted from planning a future to planning these three days.

...

Karen never imagined that Jeffrey wouldn't come home for the night. It was one thing not to return, but his phone was off too, unreachable!

After waiting at home for a while and finding no sign of him as darkness fell, she reluctantly drove back to the hospital parking lot, finding his car gone.

It appeared he had left the hospital.

Initially, Karen was furious – his disappearing act without a word was maddening! But as time ticked by, anger turned to fear.

Her mind raced with dreadful possibilities!

What if Jeffrey, driving that flashy sports car, had been kidnapped? Or worse, what if he had been in an accident on his way back to the office?

It just wasn't like Jeffrey to drop off the radar!

As the clock struck midnight, Karen couldn't sit still any longer. She grabbed her phone and started driving along the stretch between the hospital and the Lopez Corporation, stopping at every police station en route.

"Excuse me, were there any accidents reported on this road yesterday afternoon?"

"No, ma'am! Are you looking for someone?"

"No, no, thank you!"

Street by street, Karen searched, but to no avail – no useful clues surfaced.

She thought about calling Jeffrey's parents, but it was far too late. It wouldn't be right to disturb them in the middle of the night.

Chapter 704

It made no sense for Jeffrey to shut off his phone if he was just visiting his folks. At the very least, he would have dropped her a text. And even if by some unlikely disaster his phone broke, he would have borrowed someone's to give her a call!

Finally, on her way back to Jeffrey's place, Karen's phone lit up with his number, and the ringtone echoed through the car.

She slammed on the brakes and pulled over with a screech.

"Hello?"

"Karen."

Hearing his voice, Karen's eyes immediately welled up with tears. "Where the hell have you been, Jeffrey? Do you have any idea how scared I was?"

There was a pause on the other end, a dry gulp followed. "My phone died. I forgot to charge it."

"And there wasn't a soul around to borrow a phone from to call me?" Her tone was sharp, each word she yelled out making her heart race. "Jeffrey, stop lying. You just didn't want to reach out, did you?"

His excuses sounded like nothing but fabricated lies.

Strangely, Jeffrey didn't argue.

She could hear him lighting a cigarette, the flick of a lighter clear in the background.

Before she could say another word, he broke the silence.

"Karen, there's something I need to be honest about."

Her heart sank at his words. "What, you're back with your ex? You went to the hospital for her, didn't you?"

Silence fell on the other end of the phone.

"Talk to me!"

His silence felt like a heavy weight on her chest. She couldn't have guessed it... could she?

"I haven't, I'm not back with her."

A momentary relief crossed her mind, but it was quickly shattered by his next sentence.

"But last night, I was indeed at her place."

Karen was too shocked to speak.

"Where are you? Let's meet up and talk, okay?" His voice wavered, whether from guilt or something else, she couldn't tell.

But all Karen felt was disgust.

So, he had been with his ex, and here she was, running around like a fool all night.

"Jeffrey, I never should've believed your crap about changing your ways!"

With that, she hung up and drove straight to his house.

Her stuff was still there. She needed to get it and get him out of her life for good.

The sleepless night had taken its toll, making it hard for Karen to concentrate on anything but one thought:

Get to his house, pack up her things, and cut Jeffrey out for good.

She didn't even know how she managed to drive there, her hands trembling the whole way.

She didn't hesitate. She parked the car, burst through the door, and started grabbing her belongings.

Jeffrey wasn't a fool. The moment the call ended, he knew Karen's fiery spirit would have her packing her things.

Hastening back to the house, the haphazardly parked car confirmed she was inside.

True to expectation, upon swing the door open, he was greeted by two suitcases, unmistakably Karen's. However, she was nowhere in sight.

The sounds from the master bedroom indicated she was gathering her clothes.

Jeffrey, without bothering to take off his shoes, strode directly toward the bedroom.

Chapter 705

Karen could hear the noise, recognizing that Jeffrey was back. However, she didn't pause in what she was doing, not even for a second.

With only one box left – her clothes - she had to take them with her. Everything else essential for her daily life, including towels, PJs, and kitchenware, was already packed.

"Karen, wait a sec!" Jeffrey hurried over, trying to stop her from reaching for the clothes on the high shelf.

But Karen just pushed him away and continued stuffing her belongings into the suitcase with an impassive face.

"Karen! Can you just listen to me for one minute? I was with Paige last night, sure, but nothing happened, I swear. I just spent the night at the hospital, that's all! What do you think we could've done there?"

"Back off. Don't touch me."

Karen wasn't having any of it, just kept on packing her clothes.

Left with no choice, Jeffrey tried to pull out the clothes as fast as she could pack them in.

Suddenly, she took a step back, looked up at him and said, "Fine, I don't want them."

With that, Karen stormed out the door, while Jeffrey was still wrestling with the clothes.

"Hey! Wait!"

He was at his wit's end!

Jeffrey quickly stretched his long legs to catch up with her and managed to intercept her at the front gate of the villa.

"Karen, believe me, nothing happened with Paige last night! You see, I'm still wearing the same clothes I left in yesterday!"

He hadn't expected her reaction to be so volatile. If he had known, he'd have steadied her first, not blurted out about being at the hospital with Paige, and then eased into the events of the previous night.

"Don't lay a finger on me, you disgust me," Karen glared at him, still completely not receptive to his explanations.

"What can I do to make you believe me? Should we go to the hospital and check the security tapes?"

"No need." Karen dropped the words coldly, then whipped out her phone.

Before Jeffrey could even react, she had already dialed Derek.

"Dad, can you pick me up from Jeffrey's place? He didn't come home last night because he was with another woman. We're breaking up."

"What...?" Derek was confused but quickly agreed, "Okay, Karen, I'll come get you. Wait for me!"

Jeffrey was dumbstruck and couldn't help but curse under his breath, "Damn it, Karen, why wouldn't you leave me any way out?"

Just like that, all his efforts were in vain!

"Why should I leave you a way out? I'm breaking up with you, whether you explain or not!"

She felt she had been more than generous.

That Paige kept coming around, constantly challenging her. Karen thought Jeffrey was a good catch, and since he hadn't lied to her, she had held back - no scenes or fights. However, that didn't mean she didn't care at all!

What woman could deal with her boyfriend driving off with his ex, and then just accept a lame excuse and move on as if nothing happened?

Karen believed she had been more than fair!

"So even if nothing happened with Paige last night, we're done?"

"Yes! I've had enough." Karen's trust was a one-time offer.

He had taken it lightly, so there was no second chance needed.

"Do you even love me, Karen? How could you call your dad?" Jeffrey had braced himself for anything on the way back, even if it meant getting on his knees for Karen.

But he hadn't expected this – she really wasn't going to leave any room for their relationship to survive.

Chapter 706

"Call your dad, Karen," Jeffrey pleaded, his voice strained with desperation. "Tell him it's all a big misunderstanding, and I'll explain everything, okay?"

What was gnawing at Jeffrey more than anything was the thought of losing the good graces of his future in-laws, whom he had worked so hard to win over. And this wasn't just any setback—it was the kind that you couldn't bounce back from.

But Karen was unyielding.

She just stood there, waiting for her father to come and take her away.

"Karen! For heaven's sake, I'm begging you! Just call your dad and ask him to hold off for a bit! Let's talk this through, and then I'll drive you back myself, alright?"

Instead of responding, Karen turned her face away, refusing to communicate with him at all.

Out of options, Jeffrey reluctantly pulled out his cell phone to call Derek, but he couldn't bring himself to press the buttons.

He knew Derek wouldn't listen to him anyway. The more he'd try to explain, the more tangled the web would become.

"Just make the call, okay? Give me a chance to explain," he implored again.

"It takes my dad at least fifteen, twenty minutes to get here. If you have something to say, say it," she responded without looking at him.

Jeffrey raked his fingers through his hair in frustration, marched back to his car to grab a pack of cigarettes, and returned. "Here's the thing, Karen. Paige's daughter got sick, and she asked me to help out yesterday. That's all it was! Nothing happened between us, I swear. Just wait and I'll show you the surveillance footage if I have to. I didn't lay a finger on her!"

Finally, Karen reacted.

She turned to look at him and snorted with laughter. "Your ex's kid, and you're all concerned? What's the deal, Jeffrey? Is the kid yours or something?"

Jeffrey was speechless.

"Jeffrey, it's not like I haven't given you chances! When have I ever not trusted you? Even when I saw your car at the hospital, I only asked why it was there. I thought maybe you'd lent it to someone because you said you were busy at work. I never doubted you!" As she said this, Karen realized how foolish she'd been.

Why would Jeffrey ever lend his car to someone else? He was probably off joyriding with his ex, flaunting their reunion, thinking about old flames!

"I really was busy at work, I didn't lie! Paige called me..."

"And you answered?" Karen's voice was sharp. "What about all those promises you made? You said you wouldn't contact any exes, that you'd pretend not to know them if you bumped into them! So what, now that we're engaged, you think you can push my limits with your wandering eye?"

Jeffrey had seriously misunderstood Karen. Her tolerance had limits - he'd crossed them.

"I was wrong, okay? I won't take her call again."

He had initially intended to tell Karen about his daughter, but considering the situation now, revealing that truth seemed like it would mark the end of everything.

"Take your calls or don't—it's got nothing to do with me anymore."

"How can you say that? You're my fiancée! Karen, please don't scare me. Be mad, yell, hit me if you have to, but don't throw the word 'break-up' around lightly!"

"Lightly?" Karen scoffed and laughed bitterly. "You think I'm being light about this? How would you feel if I did the same with Levi—stayed out all night and turned off my phone? Would you be understanding then?"

Jeffrey had no answer.

"I'm not saying this because I want to be entangled with you again. I just don't want to hear any more of your excuses! I could tolerate your past flings, but I can't stand you fooling around after you've got me!"

Jeffrey chain-smoked one cigarette after another, still at a loss for what to do next when Derek's car pulled up.

Chapter 707

Derek, fueled by a father's protective instinct, didn't even bother to grab his coat. In just a tee he usually lounged in at home, he dashed out the door.

Spotting his daughter, he strode towards her with determination.

"Karen, Daddy's here."

The moment Jeffrey caught sight of Derek, his stomach twisted with anxiety.

"Dad..."

"Hold on," Derek cut him off, his voice as chilly as the winter air, as he positioned himself between Karen and Jeffrey, "What Karen just said... Is it true?"

Jeffrey scrambled to clarify, "There's a reason for it! It's not what Karen thinks!"

"I'm asking you straight. Did you spend the night with another woman?"

Jeffrey hesitated before replying, "Yes."

"That's all I need to know. I'm taking my daughter home." Derek was even less willing to hear excuses than Karen was. He merely looked down at his daughter and asked, "Are those two suitcases yours?"

Karen nodded, her eyes welling up, "Yeah."

"I'll grab them. You go wait in the car."

The gentle care and unconditional support from her father brought tears to Karen's eyes, tears she had been holding back until then.

She turned and walked towards her father's car.

Jeffrey rushed over, grabbing her wrist in a desperate grip. "Does it have to be so cutthroat? After all we've been through, you're just going to cut ties like this?"

"Let go."

"I won't!" Jeffrey clung on, as if he'd rather die than release her hand. "We were about to get engaged. How can you treat this like child's play? Karen, haven't I been good to you?"

"You have," Karen admitted, "but it wasn't a one-of-a-kind good, which is what I need."

"What do you mean not one-of-a-kind? I've never bared my soul to anyone like I have to you, Karen!" Jeffrey turned her to face him, his eyes pleading, "I swear, I don't have any feelings for Paige! My phone died last night, I was exhausted, and I just crashed on the hospital cot. As soon as I woke up, I called you!"

His words sounded reasonable enough, but Karen didn't believe a single one.

"So, your phone was dead last night and magically had power this morning?"

"I borrowed a charger."

"Jeffrey, can you just stop lying? At least leave me with some good memories! Let's part on good terms." Karen pushed his hand away, stepping back. "You clearly didn't want to contact me, whatever the reason. If you wanted to, you could've made it happen. But you didn't. You left me to worry and search for you in the middle of the night, only to find out you were with another woman."

That was something Karen could never accept!

He could have been a playboy before, juggling countless ex-girlfriends, and she could have overlooked it all. However, once they were together, he had to be all in for her, and her alone.

Jeffrey felt as if his heart had been stung, the pain so severe he instinctively clutched his chest.

The night before, he'd been so torn, unsure of how to tell Karen about the situation with the child, so he had chosen to escape, shutting his phone off.

He had thought that Paige just wanted him to stay at the hospital for one night, that going off the grid for a few hours would be forgivable, and he would take whatever came his way the next day.

But Jeffrey hadn't expected that a single night of absence would be his undoing.

Now, any explanation seemed dry and lifeless. To speak was to make excuses.

"Give me one chance, one last chance."

"When I first agreed to be with you, that was your one chance, but you didn't cherish it." Karen forced a smile, glancing at Derek, who stood nearby with luggage in hand, ready and waiting. "Dad, let's go."

"Sure thing," Derek replied with a nod, ready to take his daughter away from the heartbreak.

Chapter 708

Jeffrey took a step forward, itching to chase after Karen, but at that very moment, his phone jangled to life.

He didn't want to check who it was; he just wanted Karen to stay.

But the ringtone grew louder and louder, to the point that even Karen could hear it now.

Before she got in the car, she paused and looked back at him. "Aren't you going to answer that? Is it Paige?"

"I won't answer it, Karen. What if I block her, would that make you stay?"

Jeffrey's limbs were long, and in a few strides, he was by her side again, gripping her arm.

Seeing this, Derek stepped over, personally prying Jeffrey's hand away.

"Jeffrey, my wife and I were worried about this very thing, which is why we hesitated to give you our blessing. But when we saw you doting on Karen, we were convinced of your sincerity and agreed to the engagement. And now, you've let her down like this. I think it's best if we don't climb this social ladder after all."

"Dad, there's a good explanation for all this!"

"You might have one! As a man myself, I understand there are obligations and intricacies in life that can't be aired out in the open, including work commitments. I'm not angry about that. But you betrayed Karen's trust in you, left her scared and worried all night long. As her father, I simply can't accept that."

Seeing his daughter so worn and disappointed, Derek's heart was breaking.

Jeffrey frowned, at a loss for words.

All the way there, he had been rehearsing how to tell Karen about the child, how to come clean, but now that they were face to face, she hadn't even begun to question him about the child!

If he had known it would turn out like this, he would never have stayed at the hospital the night before.

"I didn't think she would come after me."

Jeffrey had figured that with Karen's temperament, she'd be furious or simply storm back to her parents' house. But he hadn't expected her to be out looking for him all night long because she was worried.

"Think it over, Jeffrey, and don't block the way. Let's part on good terms."

Derek escorted his daughter into the car and circled back to the driver's seat.

Jeffrey watched the car pull away, feeling a hollow ache in his chest as the cold air seeped through.

Suddenly, he dashed forward, trying to chase after the car, but how can a man outrun a vehicle?

In his pocket, the phone was still ringing insistently.

Frustrated, Jeffrey pulled out the phone and answered it.

"Paige, are you happy now? Karen and I are done!"

"Jeffrey, you need to come to the hospital... the baby, she's not doing well!" Paige was too distressed to listen to his reproach, sobbing uncontrollably. "After you left, she cried and then suddenly passed out. The doctor says she's not going to make it!"

Jeffrey clenched his fists, grinding his teeth.

"It's got nothing to do with me if she's dead! You were the one who insisted on having her, don't try to guilt-trip me!"

"I swear, she's really in a bad way! Jeffrey, please, just come back one more time, for a last look at her, okay? I'm begging you, I'll get down on my knees if I have to."

The veins on the back of his hand stood out fiercely.

Jeffrey had never imagined he'd see such a day of utter desperation.

"I'm not coming. Just give it up."

As soon as the words left his mouth, the image of the little girl flashed through Jeffrey's mind.

She was thin, curled up in a corner of the bed, always sleeping, rarely opening her eyes.

Last night, he had sat by her side the whole time, just watching her.

Chapter 709

On the phone, Paige was still sobbing, but Jeffrey was in such agony he couldn't even straighten his back.

It felt like his heart had been ripped out, and someone was torturing him with slow, methodical cuts.

The irony was, he was utterly helpless.

As Derek drove away, Karen's sobs finally broke into a loud cry.

"Dad, I trusted him so much. I thought he wouldn't let me down!"

Derek glanced at his daughter with concern. At a red light, he reached out and patted her shoulder.

"Karen, I've lived a long life and still can't always see people for who they really are. How could you? When two people have had good times together, that's not nothing. If it ends, don't dwell on the bad. You're the only one who suffers that way."

Karen nodded, "I'm sorry, Dad, for disappointing you."

Looking back, she realized she shouldn't have called her father in such haste.

Derek was getting on in years, with the usual heart and circulatory concerns. He didn't need the stress. But at the time, all Karen could think about was breaking up, ensuring there was no way back for Jeffrey.

Or for herself.

Perhaps she was afraid she'd soften, choose to trust him again.

"Silly girl, you were born deserving all the love your mother and I could give. Of course, we'd protect you. I'm not disappointed. My daughter is a good girl. You'll find the right boyfriend in time, no rush!"

Karen nodded again, dabbing at her tears with a tissue.

Her time with Jeffrey had been brief, so forgetting him should be swift.

Suddenly, Karen tensed.

She remembered she and Jeffrey hadn't been careful. The last thing she needed was a pregnancy scare. Sneaking a glance at her father, she decided to slip away to the clinic the next day, to avoid the anxiety of waiting for her period.

...

For Abigail and Langston, a day at the amusement park was pure joy.

Despite Langston's usual mature demeanor, at heart, he was still a kid.

Today, to be with his children, Everett ditched his business attire for casual black clothes, shedding his corporate air. He appeared more like a big brother, a mere decade older than his kids, rather than their father.

"Mommy! I want to go on the merry-go-round! Over there, over there!" Abigail tugged excitedly at Dorothy's pant leg, pointing ahead.

Dorothy bent down to lift her. "Alright, I'll come with you."

As she was about to walk away, she heard Everett's low voice asking Langston, "Do you want to join your sister?"

"No."

"Come on, let's go together."

Langston frowned, "Dad, I don't want to."

"You should."

"Then why ask me?"

Everett smiled slightly, tapping his son's head. "It's just good manners."

Looking up, Dorothy was already walking away with Abigail in her arms. Everett's gaze deepened, and he quickly followed.

Truth be told, Dorothy was terrified of those spinning amusement rides.

They made her dizzy.

But she couldn't say no to her daughter's wishes.

Strapped into the merry-go-round with Abigail, it hadn't even made three rotations before Dorothy felt unsteady, lurching back and forth, losing her balance.

Instinctively, she reached out to grab something, but to no avail—the carousel's poles moved up and down.

Just as Dorothy feared she would fall, she felt a pair of strong hands encircle her waist from behind.

In her ear was Everett's deep, steady voice.

"Stop the ride! Let her off."

Chapter 710

The merry-go-round finally juddered to a halt.

Dorothy was gently helped down by Everett, his voice cool as he pointed to a nearby bench, "Sit there. I'll watch the kids."

"Okay, sure." She nodded and took a seat on the bench.

After taking a moment to gather herself, she noticed a drinks vendor off to the right. Standing up, she went over and bought a bottle of water. By the time she got back, the bench had been taken.

Lucky for her, Everett had been quick to spot her discomfort, and she was off the ride before she felt too bad. Now it didn't really matter whether she sat or stood.

Twisting off the bottle cap, she had just taken a sip when she overheard two girls gossiping about Everett.

"I haven't seen a guy that hot in ages! And he's playing with his little brother and sister, so sweet!"

"Yeah, totally. Snap a pic on the sly, will you? I need to show the girls so we can all swoon together!"

"Swooning is overrated. You should go get his digits after."

"Why don't you go?"

"You're the pretty one! You've got a better shot at snagging his number!"

Dorothy hadn't intended to eavesdrop, but their voices were loud enough that she could hear them clearly from where she stood.

After the merry-go-round stopped, the first to actually make a move wasn't them but a flashy-dressed girl.

Dorothy couldn't hear their exchange, but she saw Everett give a cold glance and barely move his lips before the girl walked away, a picture of disappointment.

The next second, she saw Everett scanning the crowd for her.

She was about to wave at him when the two girls in front of her got more excited.

"Oh my god! He's looking this way. Do you think he's looking at you?"

"It seems like it. Hold my stuff, I'm going in for the kill!"

"Wait, he's actually walking over here!"

The pretty girl stood up and started towards him, her face flushed with a mix of excitement and shyness, "Hi..."

"Taken."

The girl was speechless.

Now Dorothy heard what he'd been saying to the others, explaining the girl from earlier's letdown.

"Mommy!" Abigail spotted Dorothy and ran towards her with open arms.

Langston just stood beside Everett, chuckling, "Daddy, do you think Mommy's gonna get jealous? You've been hit on by a bunch of girls!"

"She won't."

He kind of wished she would though.

After a few more rides, only the go-karts had Dorothy paired with Abigail and Everett with Langston; Everett took care of the kids on all the other attractions.

Despite a few more attempts at flirting, his response was consistently the same. In fact, one persistent girl went as far as asking him if his wife was prettier than she was.

Dorothy half-expected him to point her out, but he didn't even glance her way; instead, he completely ignored the girl.

Classic Everett. He was always reserved with others, hardly the type for a friendly chat.

"Daddy, I'm hungry!"

At times like this, Abigail never clung to Dorothy's legs; she went straight to Everett.

He bent down to pick up his daughter, smoothing her hair, "What do you want to eat?"

"Candy!"

Asking Abigail what she wanted to eat was a bit of a loaded question - candy was always at the top of her list.

Dorothy sighed and approached softly, "Since when does candy fill you up?"

Abigail pouted, "Mommy, I'm talking to Daddy! He'll say yes, won't you?"

Everett's eyebrows knitted together slightly as he glanced at Dorothy before saying, "I listen to her, too."