

Midnight 721

Chapter 721

"Nothing left to say." Karen no longer wanted to speak to him.

"Come on, Karen, you were about to spill the beans! Tell me, I'm dying to know."

Karen shrugged off his touch with a cold detachment, keeping him at arm's length, her eyes tinted with revulsion.

"Don't touch me."

Silence fell.

"A minute ago, I had something to say, but now? It's gone."

All Karen wanted was to get away from this place, to never lay eyes on Jeffrey again!

He was repulsive.

Absolutely repulsive.

"Karen, please, I'm begging you. Just let me know, okay?" Jeffrey's delayed realization dawned on him - maybe she was considering forgiveness. His heart clenched in anticipation!

What did this mean?

It meant Karen had feelings for him, she couldn't bear to let him go!

"Is there really any need to know?"

Silence again.

"Jeffrey, go home to your daughter. Don't make me despise you more."

Karen knew this was the end of the road for them.

And the child...

Well, was there even a question?

"Karen, believe it or not, I'm crazy about you. I wanted a lifetime with you!" Jeffrey reached out, hoping to pull her back, but his hand hovered in the air before falling back in despair. "I'm sorry for hurting you. If I'd known about Paige and me, I would've never pursued you. Can you believe me? I really didn't know!"

"Yeah, I believe you."

Deep down, Karen didn't think Jeffrey was all that terrible, which is why some of the disgust faded.

She didn't want a breakup to turn ugly.

His confession today proved that he was just a mess before. Even if he had considered keeping it from her, in the end, he chose honesty. So, she didn't blame Jeffrey and believed he had just found out about the child.

But the existence of her own child would likely remain unknown to him.

Karen wouldn't follow in Paige's footsteps; having Dorothy as an example was more than enough. Besides, Dorothy dared to have two kids for Everett because he was her one and only, forever closed to anyone else. But Karen was different.

She wasn't in love with Jeffrey. Not to that extent.

Cutting losses now was the best outcome for both of them.

"I..." Jeffrey wanted to say more, but Karen cut him off.

"Go, I don't blame you. We're adults, and we have to live with the choices we make. I agreed to be with you, so I can't blame anyone else for the outcome. And you, you chose your moments of pleasure with Paige, so now it's only right that you take responsibility for her and your child."

"Karen, I'm planning to leave Eldorria City. You don't have to worry about me bothering you again."

"Good." Her response was merely a nod, her face void of emotion.

It was this kind of reaction that hurt the most.

"So, there's really nothing else you want to say to me?" Jeffrey couldn't bear the thought of her walking away, each glance feeling like the last, wishing he could savor the sight without blinking.

"Nothing."

"Then tell me the truth, what you were about to say? Were you thinking of getting back together with me?" Jeffrey had to ask.

Karen lowered her gaze, pulling at the corners of her mouth. "Does it matter?"

"It matters! I need to know."

She paused for a moment before being honest, "Yes and no. I hadn't really made up my mind."

But it didn't matter now. She had made up her mind.

"You still care about me, don't you?"

"Jeffrey, I have no intention of playing stepmom."

Chapter 722

It was as if a single sentence had become an insurmountable chasm between two people. They could only look at each other, but they could never be together again.

"I understand now."

"Goodbye."

Karen lowered her head and walked away, not even sure where to go. She just waved for a taxi and got in.

She didn't dare to look back at Jeffrey as the cab pulled away.

"Where to, miss?" asked the cabbie.

"Just drive," Karen said. "Take a spin around the roundabout at Unity Avenue, then circle back here."

The driver glanced at Karen in the rear-view mirror, sighed, and stepped on the gas.

As they left the hospital entrance, that's when Karen's tears started to fall. One tear led to another until she couldn't hold them back anymore.

With no one else around, she allowed herself cry freely.

Seeing her distress, the cabbie handed her a tissue. "Here, wipe your tears."

"Thanks," she muttered, her breathing hitched with sobs.

The taxi drove on for over ten minutes, looping around the roundabout, then making its way back to City Hospital.

Jeffrey was gone. Karen even checked to see if his car was still there - it wasn't. He must have left.

Before she got out, the driver kindly offered her a few more tissues.

"Darling, don't cry over a guy. It's not worth it!"

"Okay, thank you," she said.

Karen took the tissues, turned around, and walked back to the maternity ward at City Hospital.

"Hi, I'd like to schedule an abortion surgery."

...

Kenneth had arranged a few reputable lawyers for Dorothy, thinking this time things would go smoothly.

But as soon as they heard it was against the Lopez family, they instantly refused!

"Ms. Sanchez, our firm is small-time; we can't afford to twist arms with giants," they said.

The legal prowess of the Lopez Corporation was infamous in the industry.

When they put it like that, Dorothy knew she couldn't insist. They had clearly made up their minds not to take the case.

"I'm sorry for the intrusion."

"No, we're the ones who should apologize! Ms. Sanchez, you seem reasonable, so let me give you a piece of advice - don't sue the Lopez family. The chances of winning are slim. Based on what I've seen of your evidence, you could easily negotiate a settlement with the Lopez Corporation and live comfortably."

"I appreciate your concern."

But a comfortable life wasn't what she was after.

Dorothy hung up the phone and began to pack her bags.

She was leaving Swevia Country tomorrow. Although her flight wasn't until noon, she wanted to get an early start.

Since returning to her room, she hadn't seen Everett.

She assumed he must be busy, perhaps with nothing left to say to her. But on her way out, she bumped into Quincy.

"He returned to Elysian Country," Quincy said. "Just left, went back to his parents. I'm leaving tomorrow myself."

"He left?" Dorothy asked, surprised.

"Yeah. Didn't he tell you?" Quincy looked puzzled.

Dorothy pursed her lips, feeling awkward no matter how she might respond.

Luckily, Quincy was quick to catch on to the unspoken tension.

After a moment of silence, Quincy said, "You've made your choice, no regrets."

"Yeah."

"Honestly, I envy you to have had Mr. Lopez's passionate love, but I also pity you, caught between such choices. Even I would struggle to decide."

Even without deep affections for her own parents, Quincy knew if they were murdered, she'd fight for justice too.

Chapter 723

"There's really nothing tough to choose," Dorothy mused aloud, her voice steady even as the weight of the world seemed to press upon her shoulders. "If I waver now, my mother's death will truly be forgotten."

Hesitation was a luxury she couldn't afford.

"You have my number," Quincy offered, genuine concern in her voice. "If you need help with anything, just give me a call."

She could feel Quincy's kindness wrapping around her like a warm blanket.

"Thanks, I appreciate it," Dorothy replied with a nod before turning to leave.

But then she stopped and called out, "Dr. Quincy!"

"Yeah?"

"If the Lopez family insists on having you as part of their clan..."

"Do you want me to refuse them?"

Dorothy shook her head. "I want you to accept, and then give Everett a chance to earn your trust."

What she couldn't provide, she hoped someone else might.

Quincy chuckled and waved her off. "I'm still rooting for you two to patch things up until your mother's name is cleared, and you let go of your bitterness."

...

The day Dorothy returned to Eldorria City, the skies opened up and wept with her.

No welcoming party awaited her, just Karen.

"Dorothy!"

Upon spotting her, Karen dashed through the rain, enveloping Dorothy in a tight embrace.

At the airport, where most reunions were marked by smiles, there stood Karen, her sobs cutting through the air, drawing curious glances from passersby.

"Seeing me gets you this worked up?"

Karen nodded vigorously, her eyes brimming with tears.

With a sigh, Dorothy took her hand and they made their way out. "Or is it that you've got some pent-up grievances and needed a good cry?"

Karen was caught off guard, her face a mix of emotions. "How do you always get me so well?"

"After all these years, when have I seen you cry like this?" Dorothy's voice softened as she patted Karen's hand. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Mhm," came Karen's muffled response.

The rain was relentless, but fortunately, Karen had driven Derek's car, sparing them from the downpour.

Once inside the vehicle, Dorothy noticed Karen's reddened eyes and frowned slightly.

"Karen, if it's too hard to let go, you know... you could still talk it out."

She thought to herself that no matter what, it couldn't be as irreparable as her own situation with Everett.

"Let's not go there. It's over between us," Karen said as she started the car, taking a deep breath before continuing. "And you can't tell Kenneth about this – that's why I came alone."

Dorothy was puzzled.

"Jeffrey has a daughter, with his ex-girlfriend."

The revelation hit Dorothy like a ton of bricks.

"Right? Shocking, isn't it? How can I stay with Jeffrey now? Marry him and become a stepmom? I'm not that open."

Dorothy was stunned, her mind racing to catch up with the sudden turn of events.

"Did he tell you himself? Because he never mentioned it when he was courting you! Even Everett didn't spill the beans about Jeffrey having a kid!"

"It's also news to Jeffrey. His ex kept it a secret from him."

As Karen spoke, it seemed as if she was recounting someone else's story, not her own.

She had cried enough; any more and it would just seem like she couldn't move on.

"So that's what happened. I was wondering you two were talking about getting engaged, and then suddenly you split."

"It's not just that." Karen seized the moment at a red light to turn to Dorothy, taking her hand firmly. "Dorothy, I have something important to do. Will you be there for me? And don't tell a soul!"

Looking into her eyes, an idea dawned on Dorothy.

"You're... pregnant, aren't you?"

Chapter 724

"How on earth do you always figure things out?"

Dorothy's eyes widened in disbelief, her gaze shifting from Karen's face to the subtle swell of her belly, leaving her at a loss for words.

"I've already scheduled the surgery. It's at nine in the morning, three days from now. You'll come with me, right?" Karen pondered and decided that Dorothy was the only one she could ask for support.

Just treat it as if this child had never been here.

She couldn't sacrifice her entire life for Jeffrey, nor could she muster Paige's reckless abandon in love, or enjoy the kind of undivided affection Dorothy received from Everett. She had her own life to live.

Being a single mom wasn't fair, not to her, nor to the child.

"Well, I can't let you go through that alone!" Dorothy sighed, her voice tinged with resignation. "Does anyone else know? What about your parents?"

"I can't tell them. They're already upset over my split with Jeffrey. If they knew, they'd storm over to the Turners and make a scene! If Jeffrey finds out about the pregnancy, he'd never let me go through with the abortion."

Karen was frighteningly lucid.

She knew exactly what she wanted and what she didn't, analyzing the pros and cons with terrifying clarity, even predicting the future fallout.

Dorothy admired that about her. She herself was rather indecisive, especially in matters of the heart, not nearly as resolute as Karen.

"I think Jeffrey has a right to know," Dorothy said after a moment's thought, sharing her genuine opinion. "His ex never told him and look at the mess that caused. You're pregnant and if you keep it from him... Poor Jeffrey."

"Poor him? The one going under the knife is me!" Karen fumed at the thought. "I never wanted this child. It was Jeffrey who pushed, saying we were getting engaged, that we could stop being careful. He said he wanted a baby, just like Abigail and Langston."

Dorothy pursed her lips, mulling over Karen's words.

She had a point.

"Look, I've made up my mind. The hospital bill is already paid! Just keep me company, and let's not tell a soul," Karen paused, "including Everett."

Dorothy smiled bitterly, "He's back with his folks."

"Planning to gang up on you with them?"

"He wouldn't." Dorothy frowned, exhaling softly. "Besides, no matter what he does or how he does it, he's fulfilled his duty to me."

Karen only sighed.

They drove in silence to Karen's modest apartment.

With the kids gone, it was just Dorothy now, and the place was perfect for her alone.

"Karen, I'll transfer the rent to you."

"Don't be ridiculous! You're making me angry," Karen attempted to help with the luggage.

Dorothy quickly intervened, "No, let me! Be careful."

Karen was still pregnant, after all.

Karen scoffed, "What's there to be afraid of? I'm not planning on keeping it."

"Karen, don't say that. I know you're just trying to strengthen your resolve, to prevent a change of heart, but doesn't it hurt?"

Karen struggled for a response.

Dorothy walked over and patted her shoulder. "I'm always on your side, and I'll support you through everything."

"Yeah, you're the best, Dorothy."

...

Paige never expected Huxley and Paloma to come looking for her.

In the hospital room, she had just lulled her daughter to sleep when she saw the couple standing at the doorway.

There was no need to question their identity, as Jeffrey's refined features were largely inherited from his mother's beauty.

Chapter 725

The height of the man was also a dead giveaway; Jeffrey was the spitting image of his father.

"Is the kiddo down for the night?"

Paige nodded, her voice soft with a mother's weariness, "Yeah, wanna take a peek? I can bring her over..."

"No need." Huxley waved off the offer, his face a mask of stern resolve. "We heard from Jeffrey. The kid's his?"

"Yes!" Paige's gaze was steady, devoid of evasion or guilt. "You can always go for a paternity test."

"That's exactly why I'm here," Huxley's impression of Paige was far from favorable, and it showed in his unsmiling demeanor. "If the test confirms she's a Turner, we're willing to take the child in and raise her, and we'll give you a lump sum for your trouble."

Paige blinked, the redness returning to her already tear-swollen eyes. "So, even if I bore a Turner child, there's no chance of marrying Jeffrey?"

"It's not that I don't want you joining the family—it's Jeffrey who doesn't want to marry you."

That was something Huxley couldn't force.

He could lay out the pros and cons, but when it came to his son's marriage, he couldn't demand it. He'd spoken in anger before, but seeing his son so adamantly refuse, Huxley wouldn't coerce him into marriage.

After all, what was the point of going through all that trouble just to end in divorce?

"I knew it..." Paige muttered, her voice breaking as she wiped away fresh tears with the back of her hand. "Forget the marriage. I didn't tell him about the baby for money! This child is my flesh and blood—I won't let you take her away, and I don't want your money."

"Jeffrey mentioned a congenital heart defect?"

"Yes."

"Well, congenital heart defects don't run in the Turner family."

Paige looked up sharply, her brow furrowed. "I've agreed to the paternity test. We don't need to discuss this further. As soon as my daughter wakes up, we can go. She's just fallen asleep, so you'll need to wait."

"I'm not doubting the child's lineage. It's about responsibility. If your family has a history of congenital heart defects, you shouldn't keep the child."

Paige was at a loss for words.

"Look, I know I shouldn't be saying this, but since it involves the Turners, I have to speak up. Paige Taylor, you claim to love my son, but you secretly have a child who might carry a genetic illness. And now, in this predicament, don't pretend like you want nothing in return."

Paige bit her lip, silent, while Paloma, feeling her husband had gone too far, subtly tugged at his sleeve.

However, Huxley, being a stubborn man who didn't mince words, had little patience for Paige's claims of selfless devotion.

"You and I both know, you're keeping this child to tie my son down, holding on to some hope of marrying him one day! Am I wrong?"

"I love him. Is that so wrong?"

"Mutual love is love. What you're doing is selfish."

"Enough." Paloma, empathizing with another woman whose child was seriously ill, interrupted, "Let's do this—since the child is asleep, we'll come back tomorrow. Or leave us your number, and we'll coordinate a time for the test."

Paige agreed without objection, reciting her number.

Huxley and Paloma left the hospital without so much as a glance at the child.

Once they were in the car, Paloma let out a heavy sigh.

"Judging by Paige's demeanor, the kid is most likely Jeffrey's. Honey, maybe we should pay the Miller family another visit. I could talk to Karen's parents, promise them anything as long as they don't break up. Who knows... it might just give our son another shot."

"If you want to go, feel free to do so. I can't bear the embarrassment that would come with it."

Huxley had been tossing and turning for days, unable to sleep or eat over the mess his son had stirred up. Despite his harsh words and reproaches, how could he not ache for his only child?

The trouble was monumental, and Huxley wanted to help, but it seemed there was no way for him to get a grip on the situation.

Once the car engine started, Huxley said in a deep voice, "We'll wait for the paternity test results. We can only hope the kid isn't Jeffrey's. If she's not, then I'll approach the Miller family."

If it turned out otherwise, he knew he wouldn't have the face to show up.

...

When Everett called Jeffrey, he was in a drunken stupor, barely able to hold his phone steady.

"Everett..."

"You're drinking?" Everett's voice was always crisp and cold with others.

"Yeah, I've had a few. No one to stop me now, I can drink all I want! Everett, I'm single now! Hahaha... Single!"

"I heard about the breakup."

"Dorothy told you?"

"No."

Jeffrey chuckled self-deprecatingly, plopping down on the floor with his bottle in hand. "Doesn't matter who told you. What matters is I'm single now! Everett, I used to crave the single life, to play around, shirk responsibility. And now, when I want to settle down, to be responsible for a woman, it all falls through."

Everett frowned on the other end of the line. He disliked talking to drunks, and if it weren't for the pressing matter at hand, he would've hung up.

"Clear your head, I need to talk to you about something."

"Work-related?" Jeffrey took another swig and wiped his mouth. "Mr. Lopez, I'm off duty today. I've had a heartbreak, I'm on leave!"

"It's about Karen. Do you want to hear it?"

Karen.

The name hit Jeffrey like a punch.

His grip on the bottle hesitated for a moment. "You have news about Karen?"

"Dorothy flew back home today. Karen went to pick her up alone."

"Huh, trust you to always be the knight in shining armor for Dorothy! If I had been like you, none of this would've happened."

The other end of the phone was running out of patience. Everett cut to the chase, "I had someone tail their car, just in case my mother tried something on them."

"Oh? Then what?"

"I guessed the breakup from there because Karen started crying right at the airport."

"Smart as always."

Everett continued, "Then my guy sent me a video clip. You should take a look."

With that, he hung up.

Jeffrey's WhatsApp quickly pinged with an incoming video.

It showed Dorothy and Karen arriving at the apartment.

Jeffrey slapped his face to sober up a bit and played the video.

Dorothy's voice came first. "Karen, I'll transfer the rent to you."

Then Karen, " Don't be ridiculous! You're making me angry."

Jeffrey furrowed his brows, watching the three-minute video until the two of them disappeared upstairs. He didn't see Everett's point.

Wasn't it just idle chit-chat?

He got up and splashed his face with cold water in the bathroom before sending Everett a voice message.

[What's this supposed to mean? I don't get it.]

It wasn't long before Everett replied.

[Listen closely to the part where Karen offers to help Dorothy with her luggage.]

"What about it?"

Jeffrey played the clip again, listening intently.

All the talk about being careful, not keeping something—so what?

Then it hit him.

Jeffrey frantically scrolled to the part where Karen spoke.

She had said, " What's there to be afraid of? I'm not planning on keeping it."

Chapter 727

Karen wasn't planning on keeping what?

The answer seemed to be screaming in Jeffrey's face.

Thinking back, he and Karen had taken no precautions whatsoever. Hell, he even lingered intentionally after their tryst, hoping to increase the odds of pregnancy, despite Karen's evident frustration before she rushed off to shower.

It would make perfect sense if she was pregnant!

But if Karen meant what she implied, that she wasn't planning on keeping it...

Karen was planning to get an abortion!

This realization hit Jeffrey like a splash of cold water, sobering him up instantly.

He grabbed his car keys, intent on confronting Karen for clarity. But as he stepped outside, it dawned on him—he had no clue where she was. Should he just show up at her place?

He tried calling Karen, but her phone was off.

He feared he'd been blocked. Desperate, Jeffrey flagged down a passerby to try calling her from a different number, but again, it went straight to voicemail.

It seemed she'd likely changed her number altogether.

Jeffrey clutched his chest, feeling a sting as if something had viciously stung him, his complexion turning ashen.

Suddenly, he remembered that Karen had been at the City Hospital the last time they agreed to meet. He had assumed she was visiting Kenneth and hadn't given it much thought.

But thinking it over, Karen had been resolute about breaking up that day, yet after her hospital visit, she'd said she had something to tell him.

Without hesitation, Jeffrey hopped into his car, heading for the City Hospital.

As he turned the engine on, the alcohol he'd consumed earlier crossed his mind. Fearing an accident, he promptly called his secretary to come and drive him.

It wasn't fear of the accident itself that bothered him; it was the possibility of being unconscious for days and waking up when it might be too late.

Upon arriving at the hospital with his secretary, Jeffrey went straight to the maternity ward.

"I need to see Karen's medical records!" he demanded.

The doctor didn't recognize him and was puzzled by the handsome, yet seemingly confused, man before him.

"Sorry, sir, that's confidential. We can't disclose patient information," the doctor informed him.

"Damn," Jeffrey cursed under his breath, frustrated by his own impulsiveness.

He stepped aside to make a quick call, and in moments, the doctor's phone buzzed in his pocket. After a brief conversation, the doctor's attitude toward Jeffrey changed dramatically.

"Sir, you're Mrs. Karen's husband, correct?"

"Uh... yes, that's right!"

"You should've said so earlier! Follow me, please; I'll look it up for you."

Jeffrey glanced at his secretary, whose face registered shock, and ordered in a stern voice, "Wait here for me."

"Of course, Mr. Turner."

He strode after the doctor into the office.

"Which 'Karen'? With what spelling?"

"Karen Miller, K-A-R-E-N M-I-L-L-E-R."

"Ah, let me check." The doctor typed into the computer, then leaned in to read the screen.

Impatient, Jeffrey peered over the doctor's shoulder.

Luckily, they spot her file quickly among the others.

"Ms. Karen did have a check-up in our maternity ward."

Jeffrey's heart, which had felt like it had stopped, suddenly seemed to come back to life, thumping vigorously once more.

"I had a quick look," the doctor began slowly, "She is indeed pregnant, but it's very early, not visible on the ultrasound yet. However, it was confirmed through blood tests."

"And the baby, is it healthy?" Jeffrey asked urgently.

"At this stage, it's too early to see much, but there don't seem to be any issues."

"That's good. That's good."

"But..."

The doctor hesitated, frowning slightly, "She didn't seem so happy about the baby. She didn't schedule any further check-ups, and I heard her murmuring about getting rid of the baby."

Chapter 728

Typical Karen, indeed!

Her style was unmistakable: assertive, independent, and bold as brass.

Jeffrey pondered what her reaction might have been when she first heard the news of her pregnancy, and how she must have felt receiving his call. Deep down, Karen probably hoped for a reconciliation; that's the only reason she would agree to meet so easily.

But what did he bring to her but a storm.

It's no wonder Karen decided to go through with the abortion.

"Sir?"

The doctor's voice snapped him out of his reverie, noticing his prolonged silence.

Jeffrey cleared his throat and said, "Sorry, would you mind canceling the procedure for her?"

"But she's already paid, non-refundable, and all the preliminary checks are done—"

"It's fine. I'll cover the costs for her."

He'd give his life for her, if only she'd take it!

...

Kenneth knew Dorothy was back in town and was hell-bent on seeing her.

Fresh from the hospital, his parents weren't thrilled about him getting mixed up with Dorothy again.

But what could they do? Their son was grown and had a mind of his own.

"Mom, if you don't want me back in the hospital, let me go see her!"

"She's already got someone else, Ken. Two kids, too. Why can't you let go?" his mother lamented. "It's been years, and you've been keeping an eye on her, fine. But she left without a word, took the kids, and that shows she's just not into you."

Kenneth's gaze dropped, and his brow furrowed. "She told me a long time ago she didn't have feelings for me. I know that."

"And yet you still—"

"It's my choice."

"You are so stubborn!"

He sighed, "Just let me go, Mom. This time around, I just want to see her more, and be closer to her. If you can't stand the sight of me, pretend I'm dead."

...

He pushed past his mother's objections and left the house.

Kenneth wasn't going to see Dorothy to win her back; he just wanted to be there for her, to make sure she was alright.

Standing outside her apartment building, he considered calling Dorothy but ended up dialing Karen's number instead. Finding her phone turned off, he reluctantly dug up Dorothy's contact.

"Where's Karen?"

"She's here, asleep. Cried herself out just a while ago, exhausted."

"Cried?"

It dawned on Dorothy that Kenneth might not know about the breakup.

"Yeah, she and Jeffrey broke up. It was pretty ugly."

"I'll come up and check on her."

Dorothy paused. "You're at the apartment?"

"Yeah, I just... wanted to see Karen."

"Oh, okay! Come on up, I'll let you in." Dorothy was staying at Karen's place, so she had no qualms about Kenneth coming to visit his sister.

The apartment was a gift from Kenneth to Karen, after all.

Soon, Kenneth arrived upstairs, dressed in a black overcoat.

At first glance, Dorothy was taken aback.

Kenneth had wasted away to almost nothing!

It had only been a month since she'd seen him last, but he looked like he was all skin and bones now.

No wonder he had been admitted to the hospital.

"Kenneth, how long have you been skipping meals?"

"Not long, just lost my appetite is all."

"Come on in."

Nodding, Kenneth stepped into the apartment.

Meanwhile, in a black car not far from the building, a man watched for a while before taking out his phone and sending a picture.

[Mr. Lopez, some guy just went upstairs.]

It took a while, but the reply finally came, [Leave him be. He's of no concern.]

Chapter 729

In the serene Willow Manor stood majestically, an oasis of tranquility far from the bustling marketplace. Its peacefulness was occasionally punctuated by the cheerful chirping of birds, making it an ideal place for rest and recuperation.

But today was different. Today, the laughter of children echoed through the calm air, for Everett had brought Abigail and Langston home, and with them came joyous noise.

Jonathan had been eagerly awaiting their arrival in the courtyard ever since he heard that his son was bringing his grandchildren home. Age had softened the once formidable man, and now, the sight of his offspring's offspring brought a gentleness and patience to his face that was rarely seen.

"He's the spitting image of you, Everett! Just look at him!" Jonathan exclaimed, unable to resist the urge to scoop his grandson into his arms.

But young Langston was not keen on this grandfather, clutching his sister with one hand and gripping Everett's pant leg with the other, refusing to let go.

Everett understood their shyness and didn't force them to warm up to the Lopez family too quickly.

"Where's Mom?" Everett asked.

"Ah, she's in a huff, refusing to see anyone. She's been in quite the mood these past few days!" Jonathan said, rubbing his temple at the thought.

"It's because you gave Heather to me, isn't it?"

Everett was sharp, quickly guessing at the root of the problem.

"Yep, it's just Heather for heaven's sake. I can't fathom why she's making such a fuss! She blames me for not consulting her!" Jonathan said, lowering his voice, trying to gauge his son's reaction.

"But

your mother has her reasons to worry. She's afraid Heather might start talking, and that woman is capable of anything. In her desperation, she might try to drag your mother into it!"

Everett's lips thinned, and he looked down, deep in thought. "Is it dragging... or is it the truth?"

"See? What has Heather been telling you?" Jonathan's voice rose with concern. "You can't believe her! That's your mother we're talking about. She gave birth to you. If even you doubt her, it will break her heart!"

"I don't care about the rest. I'm used to Mom's domineering ways, but she should never have laid a hand on Dorothy's mother."

"Your mother, she—"

"You and I both know whether she did or didn't."

Everett didn't believe his father was completely in the dark.

But judging by his mother's character, she probably wouldn't have let Jonathan know everything. At most, she would have given him a curated version of the truth.

"What are you implying?" Jonathan's brows furrowed as he realized the implications. "Did you bring the kids here today to confront me?"

"I have nothing to confront you about. I've seen the evidence Dorothy has, and I've verified Heather's words. As for the rest, we'll see what the court decides."

Jonathan grabbed Everett's arm before he could leave, looking him in the eye. "What evidence does Dorothy have? Is she trying to frame your mother? Don't forget who brought you into this world, Everett!"

"I haven't forgotten." That's why he was standing here today.

"Then tell me, what does Dorothy want?"

Jonathan sensed something was amiss, that things were not as simple as his wife had made them seem. "Your mother already told me; she just condoned Heather doing it. She wasn't directly involved! I've reprimanded her for spoiling Heather!"

Everett raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure Mom told you the truth?"

Jonathan was silent; he wasn't sure.

"Dorothy is filing charges against my mother and Heather for murder. As for the court's decision, I won't interfere. If Mom is indeed innocent, she'll have to prove it," Everett said, his voice firm and resolute. "But if she tries to harm Dorothy to cover this up, I won't stand by and play dumb like you."

Chapter 730

Everett's stance was as firm as the ancient oak that towered in the family's sprawling estate; when it came to justice, evidence was king, and he wouldn't lift a finger to tip the scales. Nor would he allow anyone else to tamper with the fairness he had promised to Dorothy.

He remembered her plea - all she wanted was fairness, to clear her mother's name, and to see the guilty face their comeuppance. It was a fair ask, nothing more.

So, Everett handed over the most elusive evidence and key witnesses to Dorothy, doing his utmost to ensure she had a fighting chance. Beyond that, he refused to dwell on the messy tangles of what-ifs.

"Murder?" The word hit Jonathan like a bolt of lightning, shaking the composure he was known for. He staggered back, his voice barely above a whisper, "Your mother... she couldn't have..."

"Heather and Dorothy's mom had bad blood for ages. If she was going to act, she wouldn't have waited this long."

Silence hung heavy between them.

"No one wishes more than I do that it wasn't my mother involved."

If only that were true...

How perfect that would be.

Everett bent down and scooped his son and daughter into his arms. "I'm here to keep my word, that is, to change their last names."

"Everett, you can't just ignore what's happening with your mother!" Jonathan's mind was far from the matter of name changes. He stepped closer to Everett, his eyes pleading. "If your mother ends up in jail, it'll be the death of her!"

"She should've thought about that before she laid a hand on Dorothy's mother, instead of leaving the problem at my doorstep."

Jonathan's face darkened. "Are you really going to turn your back on your mother for Dorothy?"

"If she can prove her innocence with evidence, that's what I want to see."

More than Jonathan, more than anyone else wanted to see.

Everett had wanted to confront his mother as soon as he'd heard the news. But he refrained, foreseeing the excuses they'd muster - denial, evasion. It was all so meaningless.

"I'll have a word with your mother today and find out what really happened!" Jonathan's temper flared, but he held back, asking once more, "Everett, if... if your mother got involved in Heather's mess in a moment of folly, you can't just do nothing, right?"

"I wasn't there to stop my mother from harming Dorothy's mother back then, and I have no place now to interfere with Dorothy seeking justice."

"Even if she wronged Dorothy, your mother—she's always been good to you!"

A sardonic smile played on Everett's lips.

"She gave birth to me, and raised me; I can't argue with that. If she hadn't caused this trouble, caring for her would be my duty. But pushing me to marry Heather, just to ease her own conscience? I can't accept that."

The Lopez family had indulged Heather enough over the years, granting her status, wealth, and influence to comfortably live out her days. But Heather's greed knew no bounds - and who could be blamed for that?

Even if he owed Heather a life debt, Everett had paid it in full!

"You're bewitched by that Dorothy!" Jonathan accused. "You're even abandoning your own mother."

"Don't you dare talk about Mommy that way!" Langston bristled with indignation, rushing to defend, "My mommy is the best person in the whole world!"

Abigail, frowning, clung to her father's neck and said, "Daddy, let's go. I hate it here."

Everett looked at his son and daughter, nodding slightly, "Alright, we'll leave."

He had said all there was to say.

Because of his parents, he had already lost Dorothy. That punishment was cruel enough.