

Midnight 781

Chapter 781

Austin had not lied to her!

Ophelia almost wanted to slap herself. Of all the people she could've picked a fight with at work, it had to be someone you just don't cross.

"I'll take my leave, Ms. Sanchez," she muttered, not daring to linger any longer as she hustled out of Dorothy's office.

Dorothy sighed, her elegant brow furrowing in frustration. She hated playing the 'Everett card' to command respect, especially since they were no longer together. It felt so awkward.

Her phone was still ringing. Dorothy snatched it up and hit the answer button.

"Hey, Everett."

"You getting bullied?" His voice was unmistakable, even raspy and hoarse from illness. It carried an undeniable authority.

"No," Dorothy replied, thinking he was just guessing. "No one dares mess with me at the Lopez Corporation! I just... suddenly wanted to check on how Abigail and Langston were doing at school."

There was a pause on the other end before Everett spoke, "I heard about the office spat."

"What spat?"

"The argument you had."

Dorothy was stunned. "How do you even know about that?"

"I tried calling you, but you didn't pick up, so I had someone check the fourth project team's security cams."

Dorothy was speechless. Privacy was evidently a myth when it came to Everett's turf.

"It's cool. It was just a little tiff with a colleague. She's already apologized!"

But Everett was clearly not pleased.

"That person won't be at the Lopez Corporation ANY longer."

"Hey, no! She came to my office to apologize. Don't fire her. It'll make things super awkward for me."

If she said she forgave Ophelia only for Everett to turn around and fire her, that would make it seem like she complained behind her back!

"She's just an assistant. The Lopez Corporation won't miss her."

"But I've only been here for six months. I don't want to stir up any trouble."

Their conversation hit a lull.

After a while, Dorothy broke the silence. "You sick, Everett?"

"No."

"Liar, I can hear it in your voice. What's up with your throat?"

He was always too stubborn for his own good. She knew he hadn't answered her call earlier because he didn't want her to hear that he was unwell.

"Everett, go see a doctor if you're sick. I'm not around, and Abigail and Langston count on you to take care of them."

"They're fine."

"I know you've got the kids well taken care of, but they need their dad! And if you're sick, you can't play with them."

There was another heavy silence on Everett's end before he finally said, "I got it."

"I gotta go. Take your medicine, get your shots."

"Alright."

Dorothy exhaled deeply after hanging up. Talking to Everett was like walking on eggshells. Every word, every sentence, had to be weighed carefully. Conversations were tricky terrain for exes. ...

On the way to the tech summit in Liberty City, Everett stared at his darkened phone screen for what seemed like an eternity.

As they neared their destination, he finally shifted his gaze to Kevin, who was driving.

"What did you tell Dorothy?"

"Uh, nothing much, really!"

Everett looked down, his voice firm. "Don't talk to her about my business next time."

Chapter 782

Kevin gripped the steering wheel, his thoughts spinning in circles. How on earth did Mr. Lopez figure it out?

"Mr. Lopez, I..."

"You're wondering how I knew it was you who told Dorothy."

"Yeah, that's right." Kevin's response was straightforward and honest.

Everett tugged at his lips, a bitterness in his eyes that he couldn't quite hide.

"She wouldn't call me up just to ask how the kids are doing."

Knowing Dorothy, she would never make the call, not even if the sky were falling down.

Everett didn't want to understand Dorothy so well; it would've been easier to lie to himself, to believe that she truly cared, that she couldn't let go.

But what could he do? Lying to himself was the hardest part.

"Ms. Sanchez still cares about you a lot!"

"But I want more than just care."

What he yearned for was love, unconditional trust, a complete surrender.

She couldn't give it.

"Alas! Mr. Lopez, why don't you sit down with Ms. Sanchez for a heart-to-heart? You're so perceptive. You've got to see that she's not entirely indifferent to you!"

"I used to think that would be enough. If only... my mother's situation hadn't come up."

He had thought about it, not to hope for much, just to have Dorothy by his side.

Those days in Swevia Country, recuperating, were the happiest times for Everett! Waking up every morning to see her curled up like a kitten in his arms.

She was there when he looked up, within reach when he reached out.

But when he learned the whole truth, he realized how torturous it was for Dorothy to be by his side when he was happy to have her there.

She had to suppress the guilt she felt towards her mother, to convince herself to put aside the hatred for her mother's killer, to stay beside the son of that very culprit!

Everett knew how important Dorothy's mother was to her.

She had been working hard since she was young, never missing an opportunity to earn money, all to pay for her mother's treatment.

Even when he planned to have Dorothy, to marry her, she was using her mother's illness as a pretext.

If it weren't for raising money for her mother's medical bills, she would never have married him.

And the one who indirectly caused her mother's death was himself!

How absurd.

...

When engrossed in work, Dorothy often lost track of time.

In this, she was a bit like Everett.

It wasn't until Kenneth's call came through that she suddenly remembered she had promised to celebrate his birthday that evening.

"Dorothy, I got the birthday cake you ordered! Thanks, I'm really grateful you can make it to my birthday. That's enough for me."

"I can't show up to a dinner empty-handed." Dorothy chuckled. "I've got a bit to finish up, and then I'll head over. Send me the address of the restaurant, will you?"

"I'm right outside the Lopez Corporation building. I'll wait for you."

Dorothy paused, surprised, "You're here already?"

"Yeah! That restaurant's a bit tricky to find. I thought I'd pick you up on the way since I'm nearby."

Dorothy hesitated, feeling it wasn't quite right.

But Kenneth quickly added, "Karen and that Jeffrey are already at the restaurant. Finish up and come down quick. We should head over soon! I've got to grill Jeffrey today, see what his deal is."

"Alright, wait for me then!"

Dorothy hung up, tidied her desk, grabbed her bag, and headed downstairs.

Sure enough, she could see Kenneth's car parked across the street from the Lopez Corporation building.

"Over here, Dorothy!"

Chapter 783

Seeing Kenneth, Dorothy jogged over.

"You didn't have to come pick me up, you know. Just drop me a pin next time. I can find my way with GPS, no matter how tricky the route."

"Oh, alright, next time I'll just send you the location," replied Kenneth, a hint of a smile on his lips as he opened the passenger door for her. Once she was settled in, he circled to the driver's seat and started the engine.

The car hummed to life, and Dorothy spoke with gentle concern, "Kenneth, could you... maybe go easy on Karen and Jeffrey today? Karen's been so scared of you these past few days, hiding out and not even daring to get in touch with her family. I don't think that's what you want, is it?"

Kenneth's hands rested on the steering wheel, his gaze deepening. "Dorothy, you know better than anyone what kind of man Jeffrey is."

"I do, but people deserve a chance to turn over a new leaf, right? He hasn't done anything that bad, has he?"

"Why did Karen break up with him in the first place then?"

Dorothy hesitated, pursing her lips. "Just a little misunderstanding between lovers. Karen told me all about it. They cleared it up and got back together."

"Karen is my cousin. I see her as my sister, and I know her well. She wouldn't say 'break up' over nothing serious. She gave Jeffrey her heart, I know that, but a split-up is never that simple."

Dorothy didn't know how to respond to that.

"Is there something you're holding back, Dorothy? You might as well tell me now so I'm prepared."

Taking advantage of a red light, Kenneth turned to look at Dorothy.

"I think it's best if Karen tells you herself." The news of the pregnancy wasn't hers to share.

Getting too involved in their affairs wasn't right. If Karen needed her, she would speak up. For now, Karen hadn't told Kenneth, and Dorothy didn't want to mess things up.

"Okay, I won't press you on it," Kenneth said, his expression softening with a smile.

They reached the restaurant soon after, a cozy place tucked away on a quaint street, not hard to find at all. Dorothy spotted Jeffrey's car parked curbside, which was hard to miss.

She looked up and saw the displeasure on Kenneth's face.

"Kenneth, it's your birthday today. Let's not spoil it for everyone. If Karen has set her heart on Jeffrey, he's still going to be family."

Her words seemed to mellow him out.

"Yeah, don't worry. I invited you to celebrate, and I won't make things awkward for you."

Dorothy nodded, and they entered the restaurant together, heading for the private dining room Kenneth had reserved, anticipating the need for a more personal space for conversations.

Upon entering, they found the room eerily empty.

"Karen must have stepped out; her jacket's still here," Dorothy said, pointing at the white coat draped over a chair.

"Yeah." Kenneth pulled out a chair for Dorothy before settling down next to her.

When Jeffrey returned, assisting a pale-faced Karen, they found Dorothy and Kenneth sitting side by side.

Truth be told, if Jeffrey hadn't known about Dorothy and Everett, he might have mistaken Dorothy and Kenneth for a couple!

"What's wrong? You feeling okay?" Kenneth rose instantly, concern etched on his face as he supported Karen on the other side.

"I'm fine, really, Kenneth," Karen reassured him, weakly taking her seat beside Jeffrey.

Kenneth shot a glance between his sister and Jeffrey, his brow furrowed in disapproval, "How have you been taking care of Karen?"

"I..."

"Don't blame him, Kenneth! It's me... I, I'm pregnant. I just went to deal with morning sickness."

Chapter 784

"What?"

Kenneth had barely settled into his seat when he shot up like a rocket.

"Kenneth, my mom and dad don't know yet. Can you please not tell them just yet?"

Karen shrank back, instinctively seeking refuge closer to Jeffrey.

Seeing his girl rattled like that, Jeffrey frowned with displeasure, "Hey, don't scare her, alright?"

"I haven't even started on you! Your thing, put a pin in it." Kenneth couldn't believe it; on his birthday of all days, he walked into the diner and got hit with this bombshell!

"Karen, do you even realize what you're doing?"

"I was already going to get engaged to Jeffrey, so I didn't..."

Seeing Kenneth's face turning thunderous, Dorothy quickly tugged at his shirt, "Come on, let's all calm down and talk this through."

Kenneth took a deep breath at her intervention and sat down again. “An unplanned pregnancy is a big deal, Karen. You have to talk to your mom and dad before anything else; you can’t just wing it.”

“But I don’t know how to bring it up with them.”

If Kenneth was this shocked and disappointed, how could she face her parents?

“I’ll be with you,” Kenneth said, squeezing her hand.

Karen shook her head. It wasn’t about who was with her; it was... It was about her own fear of facing the truth!

She had hoped to plead with Kenneth today to have him speak on her behalf when the time came. After all, Kenneth held weight in the eyes of Derek and Serena; his words might make a difference.

But now, it seemed that hope was shattered.

“Let’s just eat! We can talk over the meal; I’m starving,” Dorothy said, trying to dissipate the awkward tension.

“Yeah, right... let’s eat,” Karen said, gratefully looking at Dorothy.

But as soon as the comfort food started arriving, Karen’s morning sickness kicked in hard.

Unable to hold it back, she bolted for the restroom.

Jeffrey, worried, followed swiftly, leaving Kenneth and Dorothy alone in the booth.

Feeling the awkwardness intensify, Dorothy made her leave, but Kenneth called out to her.

“Dorothy, did you know about Karen being pregnant?”

“Ah... yes, I did,” Dorothy confessed, looking down, feeling a bit guilty.

“You should’ve told me sooner.”

“I’m sorry. I just didn’t know how to bring it up. I thought Karen would tell you herself, and if I did, what would that make me?”

After all, Kenneth had the right to intervene; they were relatives, and he had looked out for Karen like a true brother all her life.

But Dorothy was an outsider.

“Alas, forget it. I shouldn’t have snapped at you. Sorry, Dorothy, I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“It’s okay! I totally get where you’re coming from.”

Dorothy had been just as stunned when she first heard the news.

...

In the diner’s restroom, Jeffrey worried he couldn’t enter the ladies’ room, so he just paid the owner to clear out the place, especially the restrooms.

Inside, Karen was drained from vomiting and, compounded by her emotional state, she began to tear up.

Jeffrey, heartbroken and flustered, clumsily wiped her tears.

“Please, don’t cry! If it’s really too much, maybe we could—”

Karen didn’t want to hear any of it and grabbed his hand, looking up at him, “Jeffrey, if we want my parents to accept this baby, the easiest path is through Kenneth. We need him on our side.”

Chapter 785

Jeffrey furrowed his thick brows.

“Your brother isn't exactly the type to come around willingly.”

“That's why we need a plan!” Karen locked eyes with him. “Jeffrey, it's his birthday today, and I was thinking maybe you two could bond a bit. If Kenneth could just accept you, then we wouldn't have much to worry about. At worst, we'd get a telling-off from my folks.”

With Karen laying it out like that, Jeffrey could only nod.

“Alright, I'll charm him, don't worry.”

“I know you’re not his biggest fan because he's always getting in the way of us, but he's just overly protective, you know? He's always been there for me, and it would kill me to see you two not getting along.”

Karen was clearly torn. Caught between her brother and her partner, she was damned if she did and damned if she didn’t.

“I get it.” Jeffrey soothed, gently holding her hand. “You feeling any better?”

“Yeah, much better. Let's head back. We don't want to leave Dorothy alone with Kenneth for too long; she'll be uncomfortable.”

Jeffrey nodded, then swiftly picked Karen up in his arms.

Karen tried to squirm free, but he said firmly, “I'll only carry you to the private room door. You can walk in from there.”

They had just returned when they saw Kenneth serving Dorothy some food.

But there was only a polite, strained smile on Dorothy’s face, and she wasn't touching the food on her plate.

“Back already. Do we need to swing by the hospital?” Kenneth asked, still clearly more concerned about his sister's well-being.

“No need; the doc said it's normal. Didn't Dorothy go through the same thing with morning sickness?”

Dorothy nodded. “Yeah, it gets better as the pregnancy goes on. You get used to it.”

“Yeah.” Karen kept her head down, avoiding eye contact with Kenneth.

What should have been a simple birthday celebration had turned awkward for everyone.

Dorothy regretted coming a bit, but if she hadn't, she feared Karen would have had even less control over the situation. If Kenneth started scolding Karen and Jeffrey rushed to defend his girlfriend, an argument between the two men could easily erupt.

Midway through the meal, Jeffrey suddenly looked up at Kenneth and said, “Kenneth, it's your birthday, and Karen and I have got a special present for you.”

Kenneth frowned. “Well, that was a pretty big ‘present’.”

“Kenneth! Jeffrey really put thought into this.”

Dorothy quickly chimed in, “Come on, it's your birthday; that's what matters. Let's forget the rest for now.”

Jeffrey leaned down, pulled a box from beneath his chair, and handed it over.

“Happy Birthday, Kenneth.”

Kenneth glanced at him and opened the box right there.

Inside was a set of sports car keys.

“Mr. Turner, are you always this generous with gifts?”

“I don't often give gifts, and I'm not great at picking them, but I figured, man to man, you'd appreciate a car,” Jeffrey said.

Kenneth gave a half-smile, closed the box, and slid it back across the table. “I can't accept this. I'm afraid of any strings attached, something I might not be able to deliver on.”

Kenneth wasn't being foolish; he understood Karen too well and knew what his sister had in mind.

Having his gift rejected to his face, Jeffrey felt a sting of embarrassment.

He clenched his fists, struggling to keep his cool, especially in front of Karen's brother, whom she so deeply respected.

“However if you're sincere, we could have a private chat about it,” Kenneth suggested.

Chapter 786

Kenneth's words landed like a bombshell in the private room.

Especially for Karen. She couldn't believe her cousin had changed his tune!

If Kenneth was willing to have a one-on-one chat with Jeffrey, there was definitely some wiggle room.

So, without missing a beat, Karen shot Jeffrey a conspiratorial wink, urging him to seize the opportunity.

“Alright, let's step outside and talk,” Jeffrey agreed.

Once the two men had excused themselves, Karen finally let out a sigh of relief.

"Oh, Dorothy, I've been a bundle of nerves! You wouldn't believe the anxiety I had coming over here. I was scared they'd come to blows or something!"

Dorothy chuckled softly. "Tell me about it; I was scared, too."

Especially with the tension you could cut with a knife just moments ago, anyone would have been worried.

"You don't think they'll duke it out once they're outside, do you?"

"I doubt it. Kenneth's not one to throw punches."

Karen clasped her hands together in a silent prayer. "I just hope my bro can come through for me. It would save me a ton of stress."

"He will. Kenneth's a softie at heart."

...

Outside the restaurant, Kenneth led Jeffrey to a secluded corner.

Both men were tall and stood out with their good looks, so chatting by the restaurant entrance would have drawn too much attention.

Jeffrey expected some harsh words, but instead, Kenneth started with, "Got a smoke?"

"Huh?" Jeffrey was taken aback. "No, I quit. Karen's pregnant."

"Oh." Kenneth leaned against the wall, falling silent for a few seconds before finally speaking up, "You're serious about Karen?"

Jeffrey nodded firmly. "Absolutely."

"You can handle her being high maintenance, illogical at times, and impulsive?"

"Yes! It's her fiery spirit that I love."

Kenneth pursed his lips and looked at Jeffrey with raised eyebrows before suddenly switching gears. "You know about Dorothy and Everett, right?"

The subject which changed to Dorothy and Everett caught Jeffrey off guard.

"Yeah, I know."

As Everett's best man, of course, he was in the loop!

"They're not getting back together, are they?"

Jeffrey pondered for a moment, then shook his head. "I really can't say; that's their business."

"And you know I like Dorothy?"

Jeffrey could only nod. Even the blind could see the attention Kenneth had been giving Dorothy earlier.

"I'm in a bit of a love triangle with Everett, and now you, who's Everett's friend, want to get with my sister. I have to say, I'm not thrilled."

"But I am me, and Everett is Everett. We're not the same person!"

"Then tell me, if Everett and I have a conflict, whose side will you be on?"

Caught between his girlfriend's brother and his best buddy.

"I would obviously..." Jeffrey started to blurt out but then quickly caught himself, "Wait, why would you and Everett have a conflict? He's already split from Dorothy. If Dorothy doesn't accept you, that's not on him."

It was all about Dorothy's own decisions! It's not fair to blame Everett if you can't win her over!

"I can help you, talk to Karen's folks."

Kenneth didn't linger on the previous topic, cutting straight to the chase.

Jeffrey raised an eyebrow. "And what's the catch?"

"You and Karen, help me out. Convince Dorothy to give me a chance."

Jeffrey paused, the gears turning in his head.

"If you agree, I'll talk to Karen's parents tomorrow. I guarantee they'll warm up to the idea of you as their son-in-law."

Chapter 787

Jeffrey peered at Kenneth, taken aback by the proposition.

"You've been chasing after her for years, man. If she was gonna say yes, she would've done it by now. What do you think Karen and I can do about it?"

Kenneth protested, "I know she's got a thing for Everett, but it's over between them! They've got a graveyard between them, for crying out loud, and Dorothy..."

"Dorothy was Everett's heart and soul. That's the one line I won't cross." Jeffrey cut Kenneth off without hesitation. The last thing Jeffrey wanted was to end up on Everett's bad side, playing a life-and-death game.

"Come on, Everett's given up on her, hasn't he?" Kenneth frowned, blocking Jeffrey's path to the door.

"He thinks she didn't trust him enough, that she couldn't love him unconditionally. He believes the love they can give isn't equal! But see, I don't care about any of that. I can handle it, even if Dorothy never gave a damn about me. I'm willing."

"When did Everett give up on Dorothy?" Jeffrey blurted out in protest, "You don't seriously think Dorothy could take on the Lopez family, get lawyers on her side, all on her own, do you? Everett's been behind her every step of the way!"

"Then why isn't he showing his face to her? Why do all this from the shadows?" Kenneth locked eyes with Jeffrey, unyielding.

Because he knew everything, he wasn't the least bit surprised.

Every time Everett pulled strings behind the scenes for Dorothy, Kenneth had guessed it.

Jeffrey had no response.

"Because Everett has that kind of mother, he's too ashamed!" Kenneth's lips twisted into a mocking smile. "If I'm not wrong, when Everett first found out the truth, he must've clung to a sliver of hope. He thought if Dorothy could just trust him completely, reach out to him, he'd ditch the Lopez bloodline, throw away all pride, and stand by Dorothy, risking it all."

Jeffrey was a straightforward guy; his emotions were always on display, and he certainly hadn't considered all these deep-seated issues.

But with Kenneth's explanation, he seemed to grasp a bit of Everett's turmoil.

Kenneth shrugged and continued, "But you've seen the outcome! The fact that they're at this point proves Dorothy didn't reach out. Instead, she pushed him to the opposition!"

Jeffrey remained silent.

"So, it's over," said Kenneth.

As an outsider who knew the ins and outs, Kenneth was acutely aware of the insurmountable chasm between them.

If Dorothy didn't take the initiative to forgive Everett, he'd never have the face to go back to her. And Dorothy, of all people, was terrible at making the first move.

Maybe Dorothy never blamed Everett, but without him plotting and scheming his way back into her life like before, forcing her to confront her feelings, Kenneth was certain their story was done.

Jeffrey was left spinning by Kenneth's words, only catching the gist of "it's over".

"If you think they're not getting back together, then go for it. It's not my place to meddle. If Dorothy agrees, I've got nothing to say! But asking me to betray my best friend? Sorry, I can't do that."

He would find another way to deal with Karen's folks. They would get through this somehow.

Jeffrey walked away, Kenneth's voice trailing after him. "Everyone wants to find love, to share a lifetime together. I want that, too. What's so wrong with that?"

Chapter 788

That was a natural human thing and there was nothing wrong with it.

But...

"I mean, come on, there's only one Dorothy, and either you or Everett is gonna end up the lonely old cat person. I'm really hoping it's you, buddy."

Everett was always flying solo. Now that he was in a relationship and even got two kids of his own. Jeffrey didn't dare to mess with this because he had no death wish.

...

After leaving the diner, Dorothy declined Kenneth's offer to give her a lift home.

Night had already fallen, and it just wouldn't do for them to be seen together, a man and a woman alone. Especially since Dorothy had no idea how many eyes Everett had out there.

“Let’s just drive you home, then! Jeffrey, it’s on your way to drop Dorothy off at her apartment, right?” Karen wouldn’t rest easy until her best friend was safe at home, so she shot Jeffrey a meaningful look.

He quickly nodded, “Totally on my way! Absolutely!”

It would always be on his way to drop her off as long as they were in this country’s realm. And if they were abroad, he’d hire a private jet to send her home.

“Alright then, I’ll head off,” Kenneth said with a wave, grabbing his car keys and not insisting further.

After he left, Karen sidled up to Dorothy and whispered, “What’s going on with you and Kenneth?”

“I wish I knew.” Dorothy hadn’t eavesdropped on the men’s conversation and could only sense that something was off with Kenneth when he returned.

Karen then turned her gaze to Jeffrey. “What did you guys talk about?”

“Uh... just, you know, shooting the breeze.” With Dorothy there, Jeffrey wasn’t about to spill the beans.

“What could Kenneth possibly have to chat with you about?” Karen frowned, tugging at his sleeve, “So did he agree to help us out?”

Jeffrey shook his head, “No dice.”

“What’s his condition? Why didn’t you just agree?”

“Because I’m not ready to kick the bucket.”

Seeing that Jeffrey seemed to be hiding something, probably not wanting her to know, Dorothy stepped in and took Karen by the arm, “I have to work tomorrow, so let’s just get me home. You can grill him after.”

“Fine.”

When they pulled up to Dorothy’s apartment building, she waved them off and reminded them of a few pregnancy precautions before finally stepping out of the car.

As soon as Dorothy was out of earshot, Karen burst out, “What did Kenneth actually say?”

“He wants to go after Dorothy.”

“And then what? I know that! He’s been at it for years, so it’s hardly a secret.”

Jeffrey let out a heavy sigh that contained a mix of frustration and resignation, “He wanted me to pick sides between him and Everett.”

Karen was taken aback and falling silent.

“That’s why I couldn’t agree to that! It’s plain as day how much Everett loves Dorothy. I’m not blind; I can see it.”

Karen nodded in agreement; rubbing her temples, she added, "So what's Kenneth to do? Chasing Dorothy isn't new. If she was interested, she'd have said yes by now. She won't be giving no answers after all he invested in."

"Your brother... he's a hopeless romantic," Jeffrey affirmed him about this. But perhaps Dorothy was a bit out of his league.

Of all the people to fall for, he had to compete with Everett.

"Jeffrey, you won't tell Everett about this, will you?" Karen hesitated before her tone softened, a blend of pleading and coquettishness, "Kenneth is still my family, and I'm scared of what Everett might do if he finds out."

Karen had been frightened since Jeffrey's last madcap episode.

Kenneth was no match for Everett. Hell, he couldn't even hold a candle to Jeffrey.

If Everett wanted to get at Kenneth, it would be a piece of cake!

"Alright, I'll keep it under wraps. But you'd better tell your brother to keep it together. If Everett decides to act, there's nothing I can do to stop him."

Chapter 789

Karen cocked her head, a look of pure curiosity plastered across her face.

"After all that's gone down, do you think Dorothy and Everett... can they still make it work?" she asked.

Jeffrey's hand paused on the steering wheel, his lips thinning, "That's a tough one to call."

"Why's it hard to say? It's just us here, so spill it! Nobody's here to judge," Karen grumbled, "Nobody's gonna blame you if you make a wrong guess."

Jeffrey mulled it over for a second, then let out a sigh. "I honestly don't know. But I'll bet my bottom dollar that Dorothy's the only gal for Everett, now and forever."

"You think he'll stay single for the rest of his life if they don't patch things up?" Karen was skeptical. "You do realize that's decades we're talking about, right? You think he can handle being a lone wolf that long?"

"When a guy's at his most fickle, it's typically in his teens and twenties. Everett rode solo through those years, so I have zero doubt he can stick it out. Plus, the older you get, the less you want to put up with anyone else's baloney."

Karen's eyes danced as she turned Jeffrey's face towards her, locking eyes with him.

"What about you? If we ever broke up—"

"Knock on wood! We're not breaking up! Relax, my folks are rooting for us. They're dying for someone to tame me, so no roadblocks there."

"Tsk!" Karen clicked her tongue. "I'm talking hypothetically!"

"There are no 'ifs' unless I kick the bucket."

...

Back at her place, Dorothy had finished her nightly routine and was sprawled on the bed, watching a video Everett had sent.

Abigail was always the giggly one, clutching her storybooks, entwining her brother in her little world, utterly content.

Langston, on the other hand, was all about his lessons. He was seemingly enthralled with Math class, heads down and tackling problems, but when it came to English or Geography, he was out like a light.

After watching the videos more times than she could count, Dorothy exited the app, but then, on a whim, she dived back in and typed a brief message.

[Busy?]

The reply came swiftly.

[Nope, what's up?]

[Nothing. Just checking in to see how you're feeling.]

Dorothy sent it, then hesitated, quickly retracting her message.

It felt a tad awkward to care about Everett.

She edited her message down to a simple 'Nothing' before sending it again.

But staring at the chat, Dorothy thought replying with just that seemed like she was toying with Everett.

But what should she follow up with?

As she was lost in thought, Everett replied.

[I've been getting shots and taking meds. Throat's still a bit sore, but I'm mostly fine.]

So he had seen her withdrawn message!

But she had been so quick to retract it! Was Everett glued to their conversation the entire time?!

Dorothy hastily set her phone aside, covering her face with her hands.

Next time she talked to Everett, she'd have to weigh her words more carefully.

After laying there for a while, she got up to work on her project on her laptop.

The due diligence team had already sent over their findings for the day, and Dorothy diligently organized the data before posting an update to the group.

Once everything was settled, she glanced at the clock; it was nearly midnight!

Dorothy quickly washed her face and hopped back into bed, checking her phone one last time. Everett had sent a few more videos of the kids.

They must have been fresh off the presses. She only tucked her phone under her pillow and turned off the light after watching them.

Sometimes Dorothy thought if she could just keep this kind of connection with Everett, life wouldn't be half bad.

Chapter 790

But the premise was that Everett remained solo.

If he ever got himself a girlfriend, or even a fiancée, then she would cut off all voluntary contact with him.

That night, Dorothy's dreams were a chaotic whirlwind.

She dreamed of her childhood days when her mother would cradle her, tears streaming down her face, vowing that her daughter would never follow in her footsteps. Then she kept cursing the day she met Maxton Sanchez, calling him a heartbreaker and wishing him a life of misfortune.

Then, in another dream, Dorothy found herself searching for Everett, only to catch him hand in hand with another woman, looking all cozy and intimate.

The woman's face was a blur, but Dorothy figured anyone Everett fancied would have to be gorgeous. Suddenly, the woman turned and walked towards her.

As the face came into focus, it morphed into Quincy's!

Jolted awake, Dorothy sat bolt upright in bed.

What a ridiculous heap of dreams!

Glancing at her phone, she saw it was only five in the morning. Work was still a couple of hours away.

But sleep had fled from Dorothy, and she decided to start her day with a shower and opened her laptop to get some work done—might as well, since it was her responsibility anyway.

Logging into the Lopez Corporation's system, she habitually checked the conference channel and was surprised to see Everett in a video meeting.

Did this guy ever take a break?

Dorothy didn't join the meeting. She quietly closed the tab, only to notice a flashing red notification at the bottom of her screen.

Lopez Corporation CEO—Everett: [Up so early? Feeling under the weather?]

"How did he even notice that?" she murmured to herself.

She hesitated before replying: [No, aren't you also awake?]

Lopez Corporation CEO—Everett: [Time difference.]

Oh, of course!

Everett was in Liberty City, and it was already late afternoon there.

She always forgot about the time difference, probably because Everett always seemed to reply instantly no matter when she reached out.

[You go ahead with your meeting. Just had a nightmare and woke up early.]

Lopez Corporation CEO—Everett: [Alright.]

She stared at the single word for a few minutes before closing the chat and taking a deep breath, opening up a work document.

...

Karen had been on edge since the break of dawn, waiting for the inevitable call from her parents interrogating her about her pregnancy, a secret Kenneth had recently discovered.

But the call never came.

Had Kenneth decided to keep mum?

After a refreshing shower and changing, Jeffrey found Karen sighing on the living room couch.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Just waiting for a call."

"Whose call?"

Leaning back on the couch, Karen replied, "Who else but my parents? Knowing Kenneth's temper, he would've told them by now since you didn't agree to his terms. I'm worried they might come storming over."

"They probably won't."

Karen sat up straighter, "Why not?"

"Your brother said he'd give me a few days to think it over. I didn't agree, sure, but I didn't outright reject his offer either. Let's use these few days to think of a plan," Jeffrey suggested, walking over and pulling Karen into an embrace. "I thought about it last night. If we can't hide it, then I should be the one to tell them."

"My dad might punch you."

"If he wants, just let him. If your brother tells them about the pregnancy, it'll look like I eat up their daughter and am refusing to own up to it!"