

## Midnight 791

### Chapter 791

Karen furrowed her perfectly arched brow and gave Jeffrey a playful slap.

"Can't you choose your words a bit more wisely?"

What's with this 'eating up someone's daughter' talk!?

"I'm just being accurate!" Jeffrey said.

Rolling her eyes at him, Karen suddenly noticed something different about Jeffrey today; he was dressed to the nines in a crisp shirt and suit.

"Got work today?"

"Yeah, Everett tasked me with a meeting. He's tied up in Liberty City, so the home turf's mine for now." Jeffrey squeezed her hand reassuringly. "Don't worry, I'll be back in a flash. As soon as it's over, I'm racing back home. Not a minute wasted."

Karen let out a snort and teased him deliberately, "That's the same line you fed me last time, and you still managed to detour for a rendezvous with your ex, didn't you?"

Jeffrey raised his eyebrows.

"So maybe save the promises, because you know I won't buy them."

Jeffrey felt a vein throb at his temple. He had this sinking feeling that Paige would be a recurring punchline for the rest of his days, a ghost that would haunt him forever.

"Okay, how about I take you with me today? You can hang out in my office. The Lopez Corporation meetings have a video call option, you can watch on my laptop, make sure I'm not playing hooky!"

"Why would I camp out at your office? I'm not an employee of the Lopez Corporation."

"To keep an eye on your husband! If you're there, who's gonna complain? If I don't have that much clout in the office, I might as well hand in my resignation! I didn't want you to come before because you were dealing with morning sickness, and I thought you'd be more comfortable resting at home. It wasn't about hiding anything from you!"

Karen narrowed her eyes in a sly smile. "I know; you don't have to explain," she added.

She was just having a bit of fun at Jeffrey's expense.

"So just come with me. Besides, Dorothy's at the office too. She's been assigned to a project team recently."

At the mention of Dorothy, Karen immediately agreed, "Alright! You do your thing, and I'll catch up with Dorothy!"

Staying home alone was driving her up the wall.

Jeffrey had been overprotective lately, banning her from work and a multitude of other activities, which drove her stir-crazy.

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Upon arriving at the office, Karen didn't rush off to find Dorothy because she knew the Lopez Corporation had its morning meetings.

Jeffrey settled her in comfortably before he headed to the conference room.

As soon as he sat down, Everett's call came through.

"Take this meeting seriously," Everett's voice came through the phone, "Some of the old shareholders are resistant to the tech company acquisition. Rough words might fly; don't get into a spat. It's pointless."

"Got it," Jeffrey responded, pausing before adding, "When are you getting back from Liberty City?"

"I don't know yet. What's up?"

What's up? Why did he even dare to throw that question?

"I think you should hurry back." After all, Kenneth was looming like a shadow! Kenneth was passionate as fire. What if he succeeded in chasing Dorothy?

Everett didn't quite catch his drift. "Is there a problem?" he asked.

"Big problem! Haven't you felt the crisis inside? Someone's digging around!"

"A headhunter has eyes on someone from the Lopez Corporation?"

Jeffrey pondered for a moment, then clicked his tongue, "It's Dorothy."

"She's under contract, and she's already submitted her resignation. She'll be leaving in six months."

"I'm not talking about work issues. I'm talking about the mother of your kids! Are you really planning to let Dorothy find a stepdad for Abigail and Langston?" Jeffrey quirked his lip, "You're clueless, man. As your friend, I've made huge sacrifices for your happily ever after!"

He was risking the wrath of his future brother-in-law, and here was Everett, none the wiser.

After a few seconds of silence, Everett's calm voice finally broke through, "Kenneth approached you, didn't he?"

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"I didn't say that, okay? You're the one jumping to conclusions!"

He really didn't let the peep slip out since Karen didn't affirm him.

Everett chuckled, "Looks like Karen's pretty strict to you."

"Dude, I'm all for the rules at home. Unlike you, who's practically begging for someone to take charge and coming up empty."

"Jeffrey."

"Whatever, I've said my piece. It's your call now."

He'd lost enough sleep over their drama, and now with Karen's status, Jeffrey had to tread lightly. He never wanted to ruffle Kenneth's feathers too much.

If he'd laid it all out this clearly and Everett still didn't come back to keep an eye on his ex, it would just prove that he really had thrown in the towel just like Kenneth said. Then no one could save the situation.

...

Elysian Country.

When Amanda got the call from the court, she was so enraged she passed out and woke up in the hospital.

As soon as she came to, she started ranting.

"Get Everett back here! What kind of son did I raise? How dare he throw his own mother in jail!?"

Jonathan sat beside her; he was fuming as well. He was both mad at their son and his wife!

"Back then I told you not to get involved, but you wouldn't listen. And you even kept me in the dark about the details! Now look where we are. No one can fix this mess!"

Amanda glared at her husband. Even now, she didn't think she'd done anything wrong.

"Back then? You were the one who said Dorothy wasn't good enough for the Lopez family, that you didn't approve of her with our son! So why are you turning this around on me now that there's trouble?"

"I may not like Dorothy, but I never told you to harm her! Everett's always been stubborn. If you'd reasoned with him and shown him some emotion, maybe he'd have given her up. But you had to go and push too hard! Now our son is at odds with us. I've tried carrot and stick and Everett hasn't even budged."

Jonathan had even thought about just agreeing to let Dorothy marry into the family, but even that hadn't swayed Everett.

Amanda quickly frowned and huffed. Knowing her husband's mindset and approach to things, she just said it upright, "Let me make this clear. Don't you dare use approving Dorothy as a bargaining chip! I can't stand her, and I'd rather go down fighting than nod her into my family as a daughter-in-law."

"The thing is he won't agree either!"

"Who? Dorothy won't agree?" Amanda's eyebrows shot up, her laugh laced with scorn, "She simply doesn't have the face to join the Lopez family! Look at her background, she's not even fit to be a maid in our household! You don't need to worry about it, let her sue. She can't just decide on a murder charge as she pleases! If push comes to shove, I handled her mother, and I can handle her too!"

Jonathan quickly intervened as he heard that.

"Please, no more trouble, okay? Our son handed over your incriminating evidence to Dorothy. She's got a solid case. We need to keep our heads down for now!"

If it weren't for his son's protection, Jonathan would have thought of silencing the issue by taking Dorothy's life.

The problem was Everett protecting Dorothy at every turn, and Jonathan feared that pushing his son too far would tear their relationship beyond repair.

"And about that evidence, it's your fault! Why on earth did you hand Heather over to our son? I told you a thousand times to stay out of Heather's business. Why didn't you listen?"

Without Heather's testimony, none of it could be proven!

"Who could've known? You only told me it was about giving Heather some backing, that you weren't involved in the actual deed!"

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"I—"

"And I've said it before, haven't I? The moment Heather dared to lay a finger on my son, I knew I didn't want that witch around anymore!"

Amanda took a deep breath, "It was only later when I went to see her that she mentioned the missing flash drive! Who could've guessed, huh? That very drive ended up in Dorothy's hands!"

What a stroke of luck that was!

"Ha, who could've guessed? I bet Heather could've!"

"What do you mean?"

"She was so brazen because she had your backing. She figured if things really hit the fan, you being Everett's mother and all, he'd naturally cover for you. And with your dirty laundry in her hands, Everett would have no choice but to protect her too!"

But Heather miscalculated, not foreseeing that Dorothy mattered more than anything in Everett's heart,. Now, he didn't even care about his own mother.

"That can't be... Heather, she's always been by my side, and she is so loyal. You've seen it yourself! And that incident—"

"That incident?" Jonathan scoffed, "I'm only so tied up right now; otherwise, I'd have dug deeper. We should really check if that 'kidnapping' was a natural disaster or Heather's way of worming into your life!"

"That kidnapping couldn't have been staged! If Heather was behind it, there's no way she could've kept everyone quiet about it. You pressed those guys hard, and they would've rather died than rat out Heather. Don't let your suspicions get the better of you."

Jonathan waved dismissively, "Let it be. I'm not interested in digging up the past. Right now, I can only beg our son for mercy. You'd better think of what to say to him too. As long as he stays out of it, dealing with Dorothy will be easy."

"He's not even in Elysian Country. How am I supposed to talk to him?"

"I'll find a way to call him back."

Jonathan saw that Dorothy was seriously pushing the issue, and it couldn't be ignored any longer. He had hoped to delay and wait for his son's interest in Dorothy to wane, but the court had called to

demand cooperation with the investigation. Now that it was a criminal case, some damage was inevitable. Getting out unscathed was nearly impossible.

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Dorothy had just come back from a meeting when she saw Karen waiting at her office door.

"Karen?"

"Surprise!" Karen walked over, looping her arm through Dorothy's cheerfully, "Jeffrey had to come in for an important board meeting, a direct order from Everett that he couldn't reject. He was worried I'd get bored at home, so he brought me along."

Dorothy ushered her into the office, quickly guiding her to the couch.

"You're pregnant and the morning sickness is rough; you shouldn't be running around!"

"It's fine! You were working while pregnant with twins, remember? Compared to you, I'm practically withering away in luxury!"

"Why compare yourself to me? My situation was different, and I didn't have a choice."

Dorothy didn't really want to reminisce about her pregnancy. That hardship was in the past, and it was best left there.

"Pfff." Karen shook her head, lounging on the couch with her legs propped up, "Anyway, did you hear what Kenneth asked Jeffrey to do?"

Dorothy was taken aback. "About me?"

"Uh-huh! He wants Jeffrey to betray Everett."

Dorothy frowned.

"Can you believe Kenneth? After all these years, he still hasn't given up. It's kind of impressive, really!"

Karen had thought Kenneth had moved on.

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But let's face it, it wasn't much of a surprise. Karen had a hunch before - the moment the beans were spilled about Dorothy's issues with Everett's mom, Kenneth was bound to see it as his golden ticket.

"Karen, what do you reckon I should do?" Dorothy was at her wit's end with Kenneth.

She had said her piece and turned him down flat more than once. She couldn't just burn bridges and leave him with zilch dignity.

After all, his support over the years wasn't something you could just sum up with 'good job'. To put it bluntly, Kenneth's favors were the kind Dorothy would owe her life for.

"I haven't got a clue," Karen shrugged, "and you don't need one! Let him do his thing. As long as he doesn't do anything to hurt you, it's all good."

"His folks must hate my guts."

“Don’t sweat it. I’ve got your back. They’re not pinning this on you! Kenneth’s the one who’s been doggedly persistent. It’s not like you led him on or anything.”

If Dorothy took the fall for this, she’d be so wronged.

But Dorothy didn’t reply.

“I just hope Kenneth won’t stir up trouble! He keeps pushing Everett’s buttons, and I’m scared Everett might lay hands on him.”

Karen might have once watched from the sidelines, hoping that if Kenneth could win over her bestie, it’d all be peachy.

But not anymore. Having seen what Jeffrey was capable of, she feared what Everett might do if he really meant to go after Kenneth. Kenneth could end up six feet under without even knowing why.

“Everett wouldn’t do that.”

“Hey!” Karen bolted upright and quirked her mouth, “If it weren’t for you standing in the way, Everett would’ve flayed and bled Kenneth dry by now, and you know it!”

Everett wasn’t that frightening, but Karen made him sound like the grim reaper, Dorothy thought.

...

Jeffrey honestly hated these kinds of meetings the most - they were long and stank of hot air!

The shareholders spewed nonsense without ever hitting the nail on the head. Those flip-floppers were swayed by whoever dangled the juiciest carrot.

He had to admire Everett’s patience for not booting out the old coots on the spot.

Finally, the meeting dragged to a close, and Jeffrey couldn’t get out fast enough. He didn’t linger for a second.

Back in his office, he found it deserted.

No guesses needed - Karen was surely badgering Dorothy again.

He pulled out his phone and hit the elevator button, checking WhatsApp to see a message from Everett.

[Liberty City’s business won’t wrap for another three days.]

Jeffrey recalled their last conversation and then a sly smile crept across his lips.

[So you are heading back to Eldorria City after three days?]

[Not sure.]

Typical Everett, playing coy. Time to tease him a bit.

[Man, you see that Kenneth and I will become family. He’s planning to ask Dorothy out for dinner tonight and wants me to get her to come. He says if things work out, he’ll talk to Karen’s folks for me. Should I help him out? The offer is mighty tempting! I’m so torn!]

The message was sent, but there was no immediate reply.

Just as the elevator reached the project floor, Everett finally shot back a WhatsApp message.

[Torn my foot.]

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Jeff looked at the words and burst into crazy laughter. He'd always pegged Everett as a closet drama king, always bottling things up and thinking he was so slick. But when it came to anything involving Dorothy, the guy would lose his cool faster than a house of cards in a windstorm!

If Everett didn't make it back to Eldorria City in three days, Jeffrey would eat his hat!

...

From a distance, Karen spotted Jeffrey, waving as she stepped out of Dorothy's office.

He nodded and strode into the fourth project team's bullpen, where Austin immediately spotted him.

"Mr. Turner! What brings you here?" Austin exclaimed.

In Lopez Corporation, everyone knew about Jeffrey's bromance with Everett, so they naturally treated him with a great deal of respect.

Lately, Jeffrey had been attending the big cheese meetings on behalf of Everett, basically acting like a deputy CEO.

"Just visiting my better half."

"Uh?" Austin was baffled. "Your... your wife works in the fourth project team too?"

Jeffrey furrowed his brow, clearly annoyed, "You running a census here or what?"

"Of course not, sir!"

Ignoring Austin, he walked straight into Dorothy's office.

Behind him, Austin watched Jeffrey's retreating figure, mulling over the words he'd just heard.

Mr. Turner heading to Dorothy's office to see his better half?

"Jeffrey, are you finished with the meeting?" Karen stood up and walked over to him, snuggling into his embrace as soon as he walked in.

The picture of affection.

"Yeah." Jeffrey stroked Karen's hair absentmindedly, then turned to Dorothy, "It's about lunchtime. How about we grab a bite together?"

Dorothy was taken aback and shook her head, "I can't, I've got work to do. The project can't run without its members. Go ahead without me."

"Come on, it's just lunch! It won't take long!" Karen knew Dorothy was busy, so she suggested, "Let Jeffrey help you out after lunch, okay?"

Without waiting for a response, she shot Jeffrey a look.

He had no choice but to agree. "Yeah... I can help out."

"No, that's fine." Dorothy relented, "You are so kind so I'll come along, but don't worry about the work. This project is a bit complex, and Jeffrey won't be able to jump in just like that."

Karen flashed an 'OK' sign, beaming like a kid excited about sharing a meal with her bestie.

Dorothy admired everything about her, really. Karen seemed to have it all and was still the apple of Jeffrey's eye. She had to admit Karen was lucky.

At the restaurant, Jeffrey pulled out a chair for Karen, wiped down the utensils, and poured her some lemonade water.

It was a side of him that seemed totally at odds with his playboy reputation.

Dorothy was about to comment on Jeffrey's transformation when her phone buzzed.

Looking down, it was a WhatsApp message from Everett.

[What are you up to?]

Why the sudden curiosity?

[Having lunch.]

[With whom?]

Despite her confusion, Dorothy dutifully replied: [With Jeffrey and Karen.]

She didn't get a response from Everett, but Jeffrey's phone rang almost immediately!

"Um? Everett's calling me. I'll step out to take this; it might be work-related!"

"Go ahead."

Dorothy assumed that Everett must have tried to call Jeffrey first and, not getting through, reached out to her instead.

Why else would Everett randomly ask such a question?

Outside, as soon as Jeffrey answered the call, he could tell Everett was not in a good mood.

"Did you invite Dorothy out for lunch?"

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"Yeah, right!"

Jeffrey hadn't even realized what was going on before he blurted out an answer.

Everett paused for a few seconds, then gritted his teeth and said, "When's Kenneth getting here?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Didn't Kenneth ask you to set up a meal with Dorothy?"

Jeffrey suddenly understood, paused for a few seconds, and then began to laugh so hard he had to clutch his belly. He felt like he could roll on the floor laughing!

"I was just pulling your leg! You took that seriously? Everett, for all your smarts, you sure had a blonde moment! Couldn't you tell from my tone?"

"Get lost."



Everett was about to hang up when Jeffrey told him to stay, "Hey! Don't be so quick to get mad, man! I'm just looking out for you. Look, Karen and I are expecting and we've tied the knot. And you're still flying solo, buddy. I'm just concerned about you!"

"Concerned about me?"

"Yeah! Don't you get a little envious seeing Karen and me so in tune?"

Everett let out a snort, "Envious, huh? So envious that you're coming to Liberty City tomorrow. Got a job for you to take over, lasting a year."

"What?!" Jeffrey's eyes bulged as he shouted, "No way, man! I don't want to leave Eldorria City! Karen's still pregnant. That's just cruel, dude!"

"Hmm, I guess I'm just too envious of your harmonious duo."

There was only silence on the other end.

"Still want to say something like 'in tune'?"

Jeffrey quickly let out an appeasing laugh, "Nope, nope, we actually fight all the time! Man, looking after a pregnant lady is tough work. I think being single like you is the life! I envy you!"

"Cut the crap. Don't send me any more goofy messages."

"Heh, you got it, Mr. Lopez!"

After hanging up, Jeffrey patted his chest in relief.

That was a close one! He thought Everett was serious.

That guy was just too intimidating; it was better not to stir the pot.

When Jeffrey returned, Karen blinked at him, "What did Everett want? Was it still about a job?"

"Nah, he just wanted to let me know how sour he feels now ."

Dorothy looked up at him, not quite getting his meaning.

Jeffrey grinned and casually helped Dorothy clean up the dishes, "Everett's work in Liberty City will wrap up in three days, then he'll probably be back."

Dorothy's hands paused involuntarily.

Jeffrey surely saw it. So he deliberately asked, "Hey, how about we bring Abigail and Langston and all head to a resort for a bit of fun when Everett gets back? The kids would love it! Let's hit up the one in Everglow City. You're pretty familiar with that resort, right, Dorothy? It was practically your baby project!"

Karen immediately chimed in and clapped her hands, "That sounds great! I haven't seen those two in ages; I miss them to bits."

Dorothy tugged at her lip, looking down, "You guys go ahead, I'll pass. Got too much work."

"Don't you miss the kids?"

"Of course, I do. I'll just pick them up from Everett's then." As for going to the resort, that was tantamount to a group vacation, which could be awkward.

Jeffrey and Karen were a couple and would naturally stick together. And for her and Everett, the ex-husband and ex-wife, sharing meals and accommodations would be inconvenient.

"Dorothy! Don't be a party pooper!" Karen rushed over, tugging at her hand and pouting, "Think about it, when was the last time we got to hang out? Once I have the baby, I'll have even less time to go out! Do it for me, will you?"

"But I—"

"Are you still hung up on Everett, Dorothy? Is that why you're afraid to go? Afraid you won't be able to control yourself?"

Dorothy was taken aback.

Jeffrey squinted and smiled, "If that's not the case, why refuse? Isn't it good to give Abigail and Langston more memories with both parents around?"

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She got to say that Jeffrey had a knack for hitting where it hurt. Dorothy's face fell at his words, her lashes casting a shadow over her grim face.

Karen shot Jeffrey a sharp elbow to the ribs, signaling for him to zip it.

The dinner was a minefield, saved only by Karen's relentless efforts to smooth things over.

After they'd finished eating, Jeffrey offered to drive Dorothy back to her office.

She waved goodbye without a hint of changing her mind regarding his earlier proposition, and yet, Jeffrey couldn't help but press, "Dorothy, about that getaway at the resort—you in? If you say yes, I'll book it right now!"

Karen tried to silence him, but it was too late.

Dorothy paused, then turned, "I'll think about it. I'll let Karen know if I decide to go."

"Alright, we'll be waiting for your word."

Watching her head inside, Karen frowned, clearly miffed. "I signaled you to drop it. Why poke the bear? Dorothy doesn't like that!"

Jeff started the car with a click and a sigh, "Aren't you rooting for her to patch things up with Everett? I'm just playing Cupid here!"

"Even Cupid has to know his limits. You can't keep reminding Dorothy of parent stuff; you know her history as a kid."

"Why should something from her childhood still cast a shadow now? I didn't mean anything by it. I just want us to chill out and have some fun. Could she get all sensitive?"

Karen waved it off, "Dorothy has always been like this—sensitive and distant. If a guy wants to get close, be it as a friend or lover, he needs the patience of a saint. With your approach? Good luck getting her to dine out with you again—I'll let you do whatever you want if she agrees!"

"Is she really that averse to men?"

“More than you can imagine.”

Jeffrey frowned, “Well, I’ve got no ulterior motives with her!”

“I told you she’s extremely cautious with men, even just as friends.”

Jeff grumbled, finally understanding why Everett couldn’t make a direct move or pressure her into anything. Instead, he could only resort to a slow and steady approach.

...

Back in her office, Dorothy was surprised to find a bouquet of flowers on her desk. Her mind raced through countless possibilities, but she was sure they weren't from Everett.

She reached for the accompanying card.

It was from Ophelia. The card was apologizing for being rash and petty, admitting her narrow perspective on things, and hoping Dorothy could be magnanimous.

Dorothy initially wanted to return the flowers, but that seemed petty, and she could do without the drama.

So, she settled down, booted up her computer, found Ophelia on the company messenger, and sent a simple “Thanks for the flowers.”

The day’s work left her drained.

Thankfully, she didn’t have to head to West Legal Services today; the case was already on its way to investigation.

Dragging her weary body, Dorothy hailed a cab to her apartment with the bouquet still in hand.

If she didn’t get them in water today, they’d wilt by morning.

After picking up some veggies and fruit from the grocery store at the bottom of her building, she finally made it upstairs.

She had just unwrapped the flowers when her phone buzzed.

It was Karen.

“Dorothy! Have you seen the gossip on the Lopez Corporation forum?”

“No...” Dorothy rarely visited that digital rumor mill, a playground for the idle and the curious. And the so-called gossip was just half-true and not interesting at all .

“Check it out now! There’s a buzz about you today!”

Chapter 798

Even with a baby bump keeping her largely homebound, Karen's thirst for the latest scoop was insatiable.

She'd prowl through every corporate forum within reach of her laptop, eager to sniff out any piece of news, no matter how quirky or obscure.

"My news?" Dorothy raised an eyebrow in suspicion.

She'd been flying under the radar at Lopez Corporation, making a beeline for the exit as soon as the clock struck five, barely mingling with her team. How could there possibly be something about her?

"Yep, it's definitely about you!"

"Oh, I'll check it out later then." Dorothy's hands were busy arranging a bouquet of flowers.

"No, you need to look now! Immediately!"

Dorothy paused. She could tell from Karen's tone that something big was up.

So after ending the call, she logged onto the Lopez Incorporated gossip board. She expected to have to dig around for the post about her, but to her surprise, it was marked with a 'Hot' tag!

Dorothy was bracing for something juicy as she clicked. All she found, however, were a few stealthy snapshots of her holding the bouquet as she left work.

The thread had attracted other stealthy photographers from earlier that day, turning it into a gallery of images capturing her from every conceivable angle.

"Our Lopez Corporation is teeming with beauties, but this lady is by far the most stunning and ethereal I've seen! She's like an enigma that draws me in and makes me want to unravel her story!"

"Will you quit it with the 'story' nonsense? Didn't you see the flowers in her arms?"

"What about the flowers? She must have loads of admirers. It's not like only a boyfriend can give flowers!"

"I recognize this beauty; feels like I've seen her around Lopez Corporation. ages ago."

"Yeah, I think I've seen her too! Wasn't she in Project Management?"

This wasn't Dorothy's first rodeo; she'd been the subject of similar attention during her days at Prosperity Consortium and had never paid it much mind.

But this was Lopez Corporation! That was the major problem.

Her previous fling with Heather had caused quite the stir, and surely some of the old-timers would recognize her!

She frowned, ready to flip to the next page to see if she'd been outed, but the thread had been deleted!

Dorothy refreshed the page, and it was gone for good.

A few quick typers had even started new threads asking who had deleted the post about the mystery woman.

Refresh again, and even those queries had vanished.

This was for the best! Dorothy felt a weight lift off her shoulders. She appreciated the swift and thorough moderation at Lopez Corporation; idle gossip like this had no place there.

Just as Dorothy was about to continue arranging her flowers, a video call from Everett popped up on her screen.

She accepted the call without a moment's preparation, and suddenly Everett's handsome face filled the other side of the screen.

"Uh, you're up?" Dorothy laughed awkwardly.

She'd just remembered the time difference; it must be early morning where he was.

"Yeah." He grunted in response, pivoting the camera to show their kids still asleep. Langston was lying peacefully, while Abigail had somehow ended up sprawled atop her pillow.

Dorothy hit the record button, thinking she'd rewatch this adorable scene later.

Fiddling with her phone, she heard Everett ask, "What are you up to?"

"Just finding a vase for these flowers."

Dorothy's reply was casual.

There was a brief silence before Everett asked, "Someone from the office give them to you?"

Or perhaps it was Kenneth.

Of course, Everett didn't voice the latter part of his thought.

"Yeah, a colleague gave them to me."

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"You seem to really like that."

She must be. Dorothy was the stoic type, the kind who wouldn't bother with anything that didn't catch her interest.

"Yeah, I do. Which girl doesn't adore flowers? Plus, if I get them into a vase sooner, they'll last longer. They've been wilting on my desk all afternoon."

Dorothy felt that these flowers were cultivated just so that their brief blooming period could be cherished and meaningful. Naturally, if you could delay the inevitable wilting, you'd want to draw out their vibrant days as long as possible.

In that way she wouldn't waste those flowers, and the flower wouldn't let her down as well. Since they ended up in her care, she intended to extend their lifespan as much as she could.

As she arranged them, she realized something was off.

Everett wasn't speaking, nor was he hanging up. He just watched her handle the flowers, taking them apart one by one and placing them into the vase.

"You're not busy with work today?" Dorothy asked tentatively.

"It's still early," Everett replied, his voice deep and gravelly, as if he hadn't quite shaken off a recent illness.

"Oh."

Another conversation starter that fell flat.

"Getting used to the fourth project team?" Surprisingly, Everett picked up the thread again.

"It's good. Everyone works hard. To land a job at Lopez Corporation, they've got to have skills."

It was a different mindset and atmosphere compared to her previous stints at Prosperity Consortium or East Star Enterprises. That's why Dorothy was even more afraid of falling behind.

"On this project, I'll make sure you get the credit."

"No, don't. The project's too big. I can't see it through to the end," Dorothy quickly declined. "When my six-month term is up, it'll transfer to a new director, and it wouldn't be fair if my name were still attached then!"

While being credited on big projects is crucial in investment banking, a key part of one's resume used by companies to gauge competence, Dorothy couldn't be greedy.

Doing so would deter capable directors from taking on a project they couldn't claim as their own. Even with shared credit, it would feel like raising someone else's child.

Dorothy knew this all too well from her years of handling projects.

"You can finish it before you leave Lopez Corporation."

"That's unlikely, with the lawsuit and all..." She regretted her words as soon as they left her mouth.

The scars shared between her and Everett were torn open, causing pain on both sides.

"It won't affect your job. You've been leading the project, and nobody would object to you completing it."

"Thanks for the offer." That was her polite way of declining.

Everett fell silent for a few seconds, murmured an acknowledgment, and then ended the video call.

Dorothy placed the flowers near her apartment's entrance. With lilies among them, they couldn't be in the bedroom, so she set them in the foyer where she'd see them right when she got home.

Ophelia had sent the flowers as an apology. Dorothy hadn't intended to make a fuss, but the gesture seemed unnecessary.

So, Dorothy decided to pick up some pastries for Ophelia tomorrow, a kind of reciprocal gesture.

After dealing with the flowers, she washed her hands and sat down at her computer. Out of habit, she checked the meeting channels.

The first conference room had been active for about ten minutes.

It looked like Everett had jumped straight into a meeting after their call. He really was swamped.

Dorothy sighed and braced herself to start her own work when Kevin pinged her with a private message.

[Ms. Sanchez, what kind of flowers do you like?]

[Hmm? Why do you ask all of a sudden?]

[Well... Mr. Lopez told me to send bouquets to all the project directors as a kind gesture, but I figured it's mainly for you, and the others are just piggybacking. So I naturally have to find out your favorite flowers.]

Chapter 800

Sending flowers should hit the right chord, shouldn't it?

Kevin considered himself clueless when it came to romance, with little experience in wooing girls. He was a stereotypical guy who thought roses were the go-to gift, but Mr. Lopez intended to send flowers to all the directors, so roses were obviously out of the question!

Other teams had female directors, after all!

Dorothy blinked. Only then did she realize why Everett had mentioned sending flowers several times. He couldn't possibly think they were from a male colleague, could he?

[Ms. Sanchez?]

[When will Everett be out of his meeting? I need to speak with him.]

[Mr. Lopez? He's booked solid for at least another hour. Ever since yesterday, he's crammed his schedule so tight, not even sparing a moment for himself. He's meant to work three days, but he's jammed it all into two! It's like he's reverted to that insane work ethic during the past four years... Did you tick off Mr. Lopez again, Ms. Sanchez?]

Her? She hadn't riled up Everett recently, had she?

[I don't think so. He probably has other plans.]

[What plans could Mr. Lopez have? His personal life is as dry as toast.]

Dorothy pondered for a moment, and it did seem to be the case.

Aside from work, he was all about fitness, avoiding social gatherings like the plague, and showed zero interest in mobile and game-playing.

Yet, being labeled as having a dull life by Kevin, a workaholic homebody himself, was a bit of a fail for Everett.

After all, in everyone's eyes, heirs to fortunes should be living it up like Jeffrey, partying and living the high life.

Dorothy glanced at the clock and then dove into her tasks, occasionally checking to see if the meeting was over. When it still showed no signs of ending, she'd switch back to her work.

It turned out that Kevin had grossly miscalculated; Everett wrapped up what should have been several meetings in one marathon session! Nearly four hours later, the first conference room finally showed as available.

Already exhausted from the day, Dorothy felt herself nodding off in front of her computer, even believing for a few minutes that she had actually fallen asleep!

If it weren't for Everett's call, she might have spent the night slumped over her desk.

"Mm?" She groggily pressed the answer button.

"Kevin said you were looking for me."

"Ah, right, I was." Dorothy slapped her stiff cheeks, forcing her brain to boot up again. "You're sending flowers to all the directors of the Lopez Corporation?"

"Kevin told you?"

"What if I said I guessed it? Would you believe me?"

Everett didn't reply.

Dorothy's mind was foggy with sleep, so she spoke without any filters, "You really don't have to do that. The flowers I received were from a female colleague, the one I had a dispute with. She apologized and bought them for me."

If a male colleague had sent her flowers, she wouldn't have accepted them, let alone brought them home.

"Yeah, I knew."

"You didn't."

Everett fell silent again.

"So, drop the whole flower-sending thing. I don't have time to fuss with fresh flowers every day!"

Everett was silent for a moment, "Mm."

"Alright, you're busy. I'm off to sleep."

She yawned loudly, then flopped back onto her bed with her phone still in hand, falling asleep instantly, not even realizing she hadn't hung up.

Everett listened to her steady breathing. Not wanting to disturb her, he was just quietly listening through his headphones.