

Midnight 801

Chapter 801

Dorothy had no clue when the call ended last night. By the time she woke up, her phone was as dead as a doornail, completely powered down.

She plugged it in to charge before stumbling out of bed to freshen up.

In the middle of brushing her teeth, it hit her like a ton of bricks—the conversation she'd had with Everett the night before!

What on earth had she blurted out to him?!

She had actually told him to stop sending flowers to the directors, and she also made a point that the bouquet she received was from a female colleague.

Oh Lord, why would she say something like that? What if Everett just wanted to show some appreciation to the directors? Then her words from last night must have sounded like she was full of herself. The man hadn't hinted even once that he was sending flowers to impress her. No jealousy on his part whatsoever. Why did she feel the need to explain herself?

And.. did she just throw Kevin under the bus?

Dorothy slapped her forehead and let out a groan.

Was her brain fried from too much work lately? She had no filter last night and spilled everything!

After getting ready, she hesitated with her now powered-on phone in hand. Should she try to make amends with Everett?

But...

What should she even say?

How to even begin fixing this was the problem.

Her main worry was that Everett might blame Kevin, who after all was just passing on a message on her behalf.

If her loose lips caused trouble for him, she'd never forgive herself.

After wrestling with her thoughts for a few minutes, Dorothy decided to bite the bullet and call Everett, hoping to gauge between his lines before proceeding.

He should be with his kids at this hour; hopefully, she wouldn't disturb his rest.

Each ring made Dorothy's heart climb higher in her chest, waiting for it to drop the moment Everett answered.

But he didn't pick up.

He must be busy, she thought.

Dorothy felt like all her energy had been sapped. She was tempted to just flop back into bed.

The next second, Everett returned her call.

"Looking for me?"

His conversations always seemed to start that way.

"Last night I...I called you, didn't I? I can't remember what I said."

"I called you. You told me not to bother sending you flowers, and said yours were from a female coworker. And you said Kevin told you about this."

Spot on! A perfect replay of the key points.

"Uh, actually, it wasn't really Kevin who said that! It was just my guess! He just casually asked what flowers I liked, and I, in a moment of arrogance, assumed that you were trying to send me flowers as an excuse..."

Dorothy could only sacrifice herself now to shield Kevin from blame. But she couldn't continue as well. She only felt her cheeks burning up.

There was silence on Everett's end until Dorothy almost thought he had hung up. Then he finally spoke.

"You weren't being arrogant. Don't overthink it."

"Yeah! Don't worry, I won't overthink things anymore!"

There was silence on the other end.

"I gotta head to work now, bye." Dorothy paused, then added, "Mr. Lopez."

After hanging up, she took a deep breath and hurried out of her apartment with her laptop and bag.

On her way, she picked up some pastries and, upon arriving at the project office, placed them directly on Ophelia's desk.

Dorothy was the kind of person who hated owing anyone anything and didn't want anyone owing her either.

Just as she settled into her office, she looked up to see the security guard frowning and carrying a huge bouquet of roses toward her, "Dorothy Sanchez, right? This is from a delivery package downstairs!"

It was a massive bouquet, so large that the security guard had to hold it with both hands, a sea of roses.

Chapter 802

Dorothy's mind raced for someone who would send her flowers, and Everett was the first person who came to mind.

But she had told him not to bother with the flowers anymore, right?

So, she carefully inquired, "Did they say who these are from?"

"Nope, no mention. You might want to check for yourself."

The flowers were incredibly heavy, and the security guard just set them down and left.

Dorothy stood up and searched through the roses, hoping to find a card or some clue as to who sent them, but to no avail.

This was making things hard to deal with.

No one had texted to claim the delivery, and Ophelia wasn't due to arrive yet, so it couldn't be her. The only person who had discussed anything flower-related with her recently was Everett, but could it really be him?

Dorothy considered reaching out to him, but remembered it was the middle of the night over in Liberty City.

Besides, if it was Everett, he would probably mention it when he woke up, or she could just casually ask Kevin about it later.

With a herculean effort, Dorothy managed to move the enormous bouquet to the side.

She had a sneaking suspicion that Kevin might have combined all the flowers meant for the various project directors and sent them all to her instead.

If she had to take these home after work, she was sure she'd become the hot topic on the forums once again.

...

Today was Jeffrey's day off; he didn't have to work or go to the office. So he and Karen decided to visit Karen's family.

It was like ripping off a Band-Aid; better to get it over with than to live in dread.

As they got closer to her parents' neighborhood, Karen's heart started racing and her palms were sweaty with anxiety.

"You ready to take a hit?" Karen whispered, even though it was just the two of them in the car.

"Yeah, as long as your dad avoids my face and crotch," Jeffrey replied, forcing a laugh to keep the mood light.

The elder couple were bound to let off some steam, and with Karen pregnant, they couldn't very well direct their anger at her. So Jeffrey was prepared to take one for the team. He'd worn extra layers, thinking it might cushion any potential blows just a little.

"I'm scared my dad will go too far."

"He wouldn't, right?" Jeffrey gently touched her still-flat belly. "Would they really want their grandchild to grow up without a father?"

Karen rolled her eyes, "You're in a joking mood?"

"What else can I do? Would crying make them feel any better?"

Karen bit her lip. She was too tense to banter and leaned her head against the car window with a sigh.

"Look, if you're really too nervous, why don't you stay in the car and let me face that one? You can come up after I've weathered the storm. How about it?"

Karen gave him a serious look. "Are you for real?" she asked.

Jeffrey nodded vigorously, "Of course! Although I know my wife would stand by me—"

"Then you go up by yourself."

Jeffrey gasped.

"I just can't face them! Just thinking about it terrifies me!" Karen let out a dramatic groan. "In their eyes, I'm still broken up with you. And now, not only am I bringing you home, but I also have to tell them I'm pregnant!"

God, how she wished she could drag the progress bar of her life and skip this part!

But no matter how fearful she was, the car pulled up outside the complex.

Karen stepped out, still debating whether she should go up with Jeffrey or not. Before they could reach an agreement, they heard Derek Miller's voice from behind.

"Karen?"

Karen froze on the spot.

Jeffrey stiffened as if shot, awkwardly raising his hand in greeting, "Hey! What a coincidence..."

Chapter 803

Karen wanted to leap up and sew Jeffrey's mouth shut.

Of all times, he still had the nerve to crack jokes!

As expected, Derek's expression turned increasingly grim, and he could barely contain the anger brewing in his eyes. "You two broke up, didn't you?"

"Uh, technically, yes, but we kind of patched things up." Karen flashed a grin and sidled up to her dad. She playfully swung his arm, "Dad, I still really like Jeffrey, so I thought I'd give him another chance!"

Derek immediately frowned, "You are okay with his shady dealings with other women?"

Jeffrey heard that and quickly interjected, "That's a big misunderstanding! I swear!"

"Don't swear it. I can't bear it!"

"You can! You are my father-in-law and that's the fact!"

And the grandfather of my kid!

Of course, those last few words were left unspoken.

Karen had warned him when they left the house to take it slow, not to reveal everything all at once for fear of shocking their elders.

Derek looked at his daughter, "He says it's a misunderstanding. Do you believe that?"

"I do! It was really a misunderstanding. I was too impulsive back then and didn't let him explain, which is why I insisted on breaking up. Later, he came to me many times and showed me proof, and that's when I realized I had truly wronged him."

Karen claimed to be afraid of facing her parents and said she was even shaking in fear. But when she actually stood before them, she feared they would be too harsh on Jeffrey and took most of the blame upon herself.

"It wasn't all Karen's fault. I'm to blame, too! I made her sad and upset, and that's my mistake." Jeffrey clenched his teeth, stepped forward, and slapped himself twice, loud and clear. "Please give me a chance! I promise this will never happen again!" he exclaimed.

His display caught Derek off guard, making it awkward for him to even get angry.

"I think you young folks toss around 'together' and 'break up' too lightly! You don't consider things carefully. Karen, you said you would never get back together."

"I did say that."

"Your mother and I are getting old, and you still make us worry about you! You said Jeffrey mistreated you, and as parents, we have to protect you no matter who we offend. It's our duty! But then you go and make up with him. Have you considered how hard it is for your mom and me to be caught in the middle?"

Karen hung her head. Guilty had washed her over.

She knew her father was right to scold her.

Backing up their daughter meant offending Jeffrey. And in order to protect her, they'd at least argue with him; or maybe they'd cause a brawl. Then suddenly, she made up with her boyfriend—how were they supposed to face Jeffrey now?

It was a classic case of being caught between a rock and a hard place.

"Derek, I'm not the least bit upset about the things you've said to me! I truly think I deserve it, and you were too soft on me. You should have been harsher or maybe even knocked some sense into me!" Jeffrey understood Derek's point and quickly added, "As I said, if Karen broke up with me, it's because I let her down. Whatever you do to me is justified!"

Derek pursed his lips and remained silent. However, his expression was not softened.

Jeffrey took a deep breath, went back to his car, and retrieved a paper bag.

"I know you have a lot of concerns, so here is an unconditional property transfer contract. I've already signed it, and now I'm giving it to you. If I mess up again, you and Karen can strip me of everything!"

Chapter 804

Jeffrey had made his grand declaration without ever consulting Karen, never even dropping her a hint while at home!

So the looks of sheer astonishment on Karen and Derek's faces were identical.

"I'm all in with Karen for life," Jeffrey proclaimed. "I won't leave even if she's mad at me, yells or throws a shoe at me! And if she kicks me out, I'll just camp out on the doorstep until she cools off!"

Silence hung in the air.

Derek continued to watch his daughter.

"Dad, don't be mad. He... well, he's got heart."

"Let's talk upstairs." Finally, Derek conceded. He inhaled deeply and continued, "We don't want the whole neighborhood thinking the Millers are bullying their future son-in-law, do we?"

...

Whenever Dorothy had a spare moment during the day, she pondered over who sent the bouquet of roses.

But deep down, she felt the odds were on Everett. It was just like him to be so stubborn about admitting to such a gesture!

As the workday drew to a close, Dorothy waited for the office to clear out before she reluctantly picked up the roses and made her way downstairs.

Just as she was about to hail a cab, a sleek black Volkswagen pulled up beside her.

The window rolled down, revealing Austin.

"Ms. Sanchez, didn't drive today, huh?"

"Yeah, parking's a nightmare."

"Let me give you a lift!" Austin was already out of the car, moving to help her with the flowers.

Dorothy shook her head so fast it could've spun off.

"No, no! Really. I can take a cab."

"Why the formality? We developed a bond at East Star Enterprises, remember?" Austin's tone was warm and friendly.

But the friendlier he got, the more Dorothy retreated.

"Austin, really, it's fine. You should head home."

Seeing her reaction, Austin paused, and then it clicked.

"Ah! I get it! Worried about Mr. Lopez getting jealous, right? Well, I won't be the one to upset him then!"

Dorothy sighed, "Everett and I—"

"Had a fight?"

"Not exactly..."

"I didn't realize Mr. Lopez was so possessive. But I guess it makes sense; you're beautiful, and he's got to keep an eye out. Wouldn't want another Mr. Lane situation."

Lane's name seemed to only exist in Austin's conversations now.

Ever since Everett had crushed him, Lane had disappeared without a trace. Of course, Dorothy had no desire to keep tabs on him.

"Lane's had it rough," Austin continued. "Heard he's starting from scratch again. And he has to avoid the Lopez Corporation's turf. If he wants business, he has to partner up with their rivals. I mean, why'd he even tried to compete for affection with Mr. Lopez?"

Dorothy's expression darkened, her voice stern, "Lane and I were just colleagues, Austin. I'd rather not hear about him."

"Ah, my bad! I shouldn't have brought him up. I'll head out now; see you tomorrow."

"Sure."

As Dorothy watched Austin's car drive away, she let out a sigh of relief, only to be interrupted by a call from Kevin.

The moment she saw his number, her lips couldn't help but curl into a smile.

This must be Everett claiming the flowers, right?

"Hello, Kevin, what's up?"

"Ms. Sanchez, I thought you said you didn't like flowers. So... why did you accept someone else's today? Mr. Lopez knows, and he's trying to play it cool, but he's insisting I cancel his appointment for shots at the clinic today!"

Chapter 805

Dorothy was utterly befuddled.

Did that mean...

"The flowers weren't from Everett?"

"Of course not! You told Mr. Lopez not to send any!"

Dorothy furrowed her perfectly arched brows, her gaze falling upon the large bouquet of roses, "Wait, I don't get it. Why would Everett cancel his hospital appointment for the shots?"

Was there a connection between the two?

It couldn't possibly be that Everett was trying to gain her sympathy by playing the sick card, could it?

No, that didn't make sense. If that were his intention, he wouldn't have kept his illness a secret from her from day one.

"Because he's cramming all his work into his schedule, even using the time for his shots for meetings!"

Dorothy was more befuddled. Was he trying to occupy his mind with work?

Seeing her confusion, Kevin spelled it out, "You still don't get it? Mr. Lopez is trying to cut short his business trip in Liberty City. He's eager to get back home!"

Only when Dorothy heard this did she find the situation somewhat ludicrous.

"Kevin, aren't you reading too much into this?"

Whether Everett returned home sooner or later, it had nothing to do with her.

"Then why do you think Mr. Lopez is in such a rush?"

"How should I know?"

Kevin sighed on the other end, "Forget it, this is too hard to explain! Just persuade Mr. Lopez to get his shots on time. It's only two more days, anyway. We don't want him getting worse once he's back in the country!"

"I'll talk to him."

After hanging up, Dorothy shot Everett a message on WhatsApp.

[You're skipping your shots again.]

When he didn't reply, she assumed Everett was just busy.

Glancing down at the bouquet at her feet, the roses suddenly lost their charm. As she wondered who could have sent them, her phone rang.

Assuming it was Everett, she answered without looking at the caller ID.

"Everett, can't you take better care of yourself?"

"Dorothy, it's me."

"Uh. Kenneth?" Only then did Dorothy glance at the screen; indeed, it was Kenneth Nelson on the line.

"Yeah." But Kenneth, as if he hadn't heard her previous remark, chuckled softly, "Did you get the flowers I sent you?"

She paused, "You sent them?"

"Yes! I saw the photo Karen shared on the Lopez Corporation forum yesterday, you looked so lovely holding that bouquet. I wanted to give you one too. I hope you like them."

"...Yes, I do."

"That's great! Anytime you want something, just let me know. Just... don't accept flowers from anyone else, okay?"

It dawned on Dorothy just then how easily her stroll through the office with a bouquet had led to misunderstandings.

Everett must have thought she was accepting another man's advances. Now Kenneth thought the same.

She instinctively wanted to clarify, but the words were swallowed back at the last second. It would be the best chance to let Kenneth give up on her.

"I can't stay single forever, Kenneth. If I meet the right person, I still plan to settle down."

"You've found someone else?"

"It's not that I'm in love, just thinking of getting to know him better! We're at the same company, bumping into each other all the time, so it's easy to develop feelings. Plus, he's been really caring, a good guy, and very understanding of me." As Dorothy spoke, her mind was filled with inescapable thoughts of Everett.

Kenneth seemed to fall silent, as if cut loose.

Until Dorothy nudged him, "Kenneth? Anything else, or can I go?"

"Wait! Dorothy, without Everett... you are still passing me off?"

Chapter 806

"Kenneth, we're just friends."

Kenneth let out a bitter laugh, "You're so brutal. "

"It's the truth! Look, Kenneth, you should move on and find someone new. I'm not a catch, and I'm definitely not worth all this fuss," Dorothy said, clenching her fists as if to muster her courage.

"Even if I do get remarried, it won't be with you."

With those final words, she hung up the phone just as a yellow cab pulled up to the curb.

Dorothy waved it down and slid into the back seat. As the cab drove off, a single bouquet of roses lay forgotten on the sidewalk.

...

Everett saw Dorothy's message on WhatsApp while he was reviewing some contracts. He set his phone aside without replying. There was too much to sort out before he could even think about heading back home, or else he'd be flying back across the pond within days.

When he finally got around to calling her back, all he got was a busy signal.

Kevin walked in, holding a stack of papers and shooting Mr. Lopez a stealthy glance. The tension was palpable.

"Mr. Lopez."

Everett looked up, his gaze fixing on Kevin for a few seconds, which was enough to make Kevin's skin crawl.

"Did you not understand what I told you?" Everett asked.

"Of course, sir! You mean about...?" Kevin hedged.

"I told you not to discuss my business with Dorothy."

Kevin grimaced, knowing this was going to come back and bite him.

"But sir, you refuse to get that shot, and I'm at my wit's end here! You've already cut your business trip to Liberty City from ten days to three and started work at the crack of dawn. And now you've crammed it into two days, barely getting three hours of sleep!"

If Everett kept this up, he just couldn't tell if this man would die unexpectedly or not.

How could anyone survive on three hours of sleep, let alone manage meetings, negotiations, contracts, and still find time to play with his kids? Everett was pushing the limits of human endurance.

"I can't sleep anyway. I need to get back, there's a ton to do at headquarters."

"Right, all for Ms. Sanchez..."

"What was that?" Everett didn't quite catch Kevin's mumbling.

"Nothing! Are you sure you want to cancel the doctor's appointment? You could go over the contracts while you're getting the shot. It doesn't have to delay treatment!"

Everett frowned.

"I know it won't keep me from going over the contracts. But I could have a meeting during that time," he mused.

"Well, I've already informed Ms. Sanchez. If you don't show up and she asks, I have to tell the truth. I can't lie to her!"

There was a pause from Everett before Kevin added, "Shall I go then, Mr. Lopez?" He started for the door.

Everett coughed and lowered his voice, "No need to cancel."

"Great! I'll arrange the car."

Just as Kevin was about to leave, Everett called out to him again. "Did you find out what I asked you to look into?"

Kevin's eyes darted as he remembered, "Yes! I had the lobby surveillance checked and got in touch with the delivery man who sent the flowers. The bouquet was so huge that the guy remembered it well. He picked it up from Delight Flower Shop on Unity Avenue."

Everett's brow furrowed, "Get to the point."

"I called the shop. The owner said the person who ordered the flowers didn't request a card, so she doesn't know who it was. But they left a phone number."

Kevin handed Everett the number he had scribbled down.

Everett immediately opened WhatsApp and searched for the number's associated account.

The name popped up instantly—Kenneth.

"When's the next flight back home?"

Kevin thought for a moment, "There should be one around 3:30 PM."

"Book it."

"What?"

Everett's gaze was stern, his jaw set, "Book the flight, I'm heading back to Eldorria City today."

Chapter 807

"Wha-?"

Kevin blinked, not catching the flurry of taps Mr. Lopez had executed on his smartphone. As a result, he was clueless and a tad startled. "Mr. Lopez, your schedule's packed with appointments. You're canceling all of them on such short notice?" he asked.

"I need to head back home for a while, then I'll return after some time," Everett replied, tapping his fingers restlessly on the desk. "Just say I've come down with something nasty and can't meet anyone."

"Got it, Mr. Lopez," Kevin said as he made his exit and glanced at his own phone screen.

Why did Mr. Lopez lose his cool over that number?

Driven by curiosity, he dialed the mysterious number from his personal phone.

After a few rings, a man's voice came through.

"Hello, this is Kenneth speaking. May I ask who's calling?"

Kevin hung up immediately, a smirk spreading across his face.

Well, isn't that revealing?

Time to book a flight!

...

After Jeffrey and Karen entered the house, they mulled over how to break the news of their secret marriage and pregnancy.

Jeffrey's string of solemn promises and self-imposed penalties had had an effect. At least Derek wasn't as furious as they imagined.

Oh, wait. Maybe it was because today's main event hadn't unfolded yet.

With that in mind, Karen tugged on Jeffrey's sleeve, "You need to tell them about us registering our marriage."

Jeffrey licked his lips nervously. "Now?" he lowered his voice.

"Yeah, while my dad's not angry."

"And the baby? Should we tell them about that too?"

Karen shook her head frantically, "No, no, no! My dad can't handle that just yet. Let's wait on that!"

While they whispered to each other, Derek was the picture of calm, lounging on the couch as if waiting for someone.

Soon, the doorbell rang!

Karen's gaze snapped toward the sound—

It was her cousin Kenneth!

Jeffrey's heart sank a bit as well. Why on earth had Derek called Kenneth over?

"Uncle," Kenneth greeted as he came in, carrying a basket of fruit and some pastries.

"You could've just come by. No need for gifts." Derek's eyes crinkled with a smile as he pulled Kenneth aside. "I called you over for a bit of advice!"

Kenneth glanced at Karen and Jeffrey sitting in the living room and caught on right away, "They made up."

"You knew?" Derek was taken aback.

"Well, they're sitting together, aren't they? I know Karen well; if they hadn't patched things up, she would've booted Jeffrey out by now."

Derek sighed, "I'm just... I'm not sure what to do. Your aunt and I have been worried sick, so we thought we'd get your take on things. Jeffrey gave me this unconditional property transfer agreement. Now, even if we don't care about his money, I figured it's a kind of security for Karen."

"Let me see it," Kenneth suggested as they moved into the bedroom. He skimmed the contract Jeffrey had handed over earlier.

At first, he thought it was just a ploy by Jeffrey to ask for forgiveness. But after reading the fine print, it was clear Jeffrey wasn't leaving himself any room for error.

The contract was legally binding, and even Jeffrey's parents had signed off on it to signal their consent.

"What do you think?" Derek peered at him eagerly.

"Uncle, to be honest... I knew they got back together," Kenneth confessed, his lips pressed into a thin line. "They told me on my birthday."

"I thought as much. You and Karen are close; you must've known early on!"

"Now that it's all out in the open, we should probably get their wedding sorted out sooner rather than later. Otherwise, Karen's baby bump won't wait."

Chapter 808

Planning a wedding?

A baby bump?

Derek was stupefied for a few seconds before the realization hit him.

After all, he'd been around the block a few times; he knew what was up.

"Karen's...pregnant?!"

Kenneth seemed just as stunned, "She didn't tell you?"

Derek shook his head. It almost knocked him off his feet; he stumbled back a few steps.

Kenneth quickly steadied him and patted his back for comfort, "Uncle, don't get too worked up. I know this news is a shocker, but think about how they stick together every single day, the pregnancy thing is bound to happen. Besides, Jeffrey's given Karen the kind of commitment most guys wouldn't be capable of."

"Since when are you team Jeffrey?" Derek had the impression Kenneth wasn't Jeffrey's biggest fan.

"It's not about taking sides, it's about the fact that Karen's already expecting. What's the point of talking about anything else? Don't you just want to make sure Karen's treated right?"

Derek nodded and let out a heavy sigh, "Yeah. The Turners are influential and loaded; if they decided to mistreat Karen, I fear she wouldn't stand a chance!"

And now with a child on the way...

"Uncle, even if Karen ended up with a Joe Average, there's no guarantee he'd be a stand-up guy."

"You've got a point."

Kenneth smiled, "Let's just let them be. I can see Jeffrey's sincerity, and him stepping up like this is no small feat."

It took Derek a long while, but he finally nodded, “Well, well!”

Outside, Karen and Jeffrey were on pins and needles! They were too scared to barge in, yet worried Kenneth might bad-mouth Jeffrey to her dad.

After all, Jeffrey was Everett’s guy, so Kenneth disliking him made sense.

“Should I go knock on the door?” Jeffrey was the most worried.

“Yeah, go check on them!”

“Alright.”

As Jeffrey stood up, he saw Kenneth guiding Derek towards them.

Quick on his feet, Jeffrey helped support Derek on the other side.

Not being pushed away gave Jeffrey a glimmer of hope.

“Karen, is there something else you need to tell me?”

“Um...” Karen hung her head, hemming and hawing, “Dad, I...I’m pregnant...and Jeffrey and I have gotten our license...”

“You, my girl, have really stirred the pot!” Derek chided, but without any other actions.

It was clear he had already been mollified.

A long silence fell among them, until Derek finally spoke and turned his eyes to Jeffrey.

“So, when do you plan to have the wedding? I can’t have my daughter walking down the aisle with a baby bump; we can’t afford that kind of talk!”

“Whenever you say, sir, even tomorrow!”

Derek pondered for a moment, then declared, “Let’s aim for early next month, you pick the day.”

“Great!”

Jeffrey nodded eagerly, his gaze flicking to Kenneth. He wondered if Kenneth thought he had agreed to whatever terms were set to get him on side-that must be why Kenneth had spoken up for him. Otherwise, Derek wouldn’t have taken this news lying down.

In the end, everything settled down without further drama.

Karen also breathed a sigh of relief.

While Derek pulled Jeffrey aside for a private chat, Karen looked up at her cousin.

“Kenneth, why did you suddenly...”

“Suddenly help you out, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

Kenneth curled his lip slightly, “Dorothy turned me down, quite definitively.”

Karen looked down, "It was to be expected."

"Yeah." He exhaled deeply, "So I figured, I might as well play cupid for someone, right?"

Chapter 809

Karen could see the bitterness tugging at the corners of her cousin's mouth. She knew better than anyone how much he had fallen for Dorothy.

"Hey, you'll find the right one, you're still young," she said, trying to offer some comfort.

Kenneth just shook his head, "There won't be another one. I think I've lost it."

Karen fell silent, not knowing what to say.

"Don't worry about me," Kenneth continued, "You've got your hands full with the wedding prep. It's not a walk in the park, you know. If you need anything, just holler. I might not be a fan of your future hubby, but as long as he treats you right, that's what counts."

Tears suddenly welled up in Karen's eyes.

"I'm sorry. You've been there for me, and I couldn't..."

"Sorry? For what? Maybe I'm just not good enough, huh? Some things aren't meant to be, no matter how hard you wish for them."

Kenneth had run through this scenario in his mind a thousand times, knowing all too well that Dorothy's chances of saying 'yes' were slim to none.

But that's the thing about longing for something so deeply; you can't help but hope against hope that the slightest chance might just land in your lap.

Now, with his dream shattered, he had no choice but to face the music.

...

The next day was a Friday, and Dorothy woke up early. She freshened up and headed to the office outright.

She was the only one in the fourth project team there; the office was quiet as a tomb.

She cherished this tranquility, feeling as if the world was hers alone.

After compiling and printing thirteen sets of documents for the morning meeting, she neatly placed them on her desk. Then she washed a cloth and wiped down the office. The cleaning crew did their job, but with a long weekend ahead, she wanted everything to be extra tidy.

Once everything was in order, Dorothy sat back at her desk and flipped through her phone.

Everett had been surprisingly quiet yesterday, with not a single message or video of the kids, and Kevin was MIA too.

She wondered if Kevin had been told not to message her, but she didn't want to pry. What if they were just busy? After all, Everett usually kept her updated on Abigail and Langston's latest antics.

"Ms. Sanchez, time for the meeting!" her assistant called, snapping Dorothy out of her reverie.

She quickly nodded, gathering the documents and heading out the door.

Dorothy knew it had been a tough week for everyone, so she hadn't assigned any weekend work. That would allow them some time to recharge.

An hour later, as the meeting wrapped up and she was about to leave, Austin stopped her.

"Ms. Sanchez! Team dinner tonight – I'll text you the BBQ's address!"

"Tonight?" she asked, taken aback.

Usually, a team dinner was planned beforehand.

"Yeah! Let's all head over after work. We thought about doing it tomorrow, but some of the parents wanted the weekend free for their kids, so we moved it up. Can you make it?"

Since the meeting had just ended and the fourth project team members were still around, all eyes were on her.

Dorothy couldn't bring herself to say no.

Thinking it over, she'd be with the fourth project team for another six months, and standing out as a lone wolf didn't seem appealing. So she nodded, "Sure, I can make it. And today, coffee's on me. Let me know what you want in the group chat!"

"Awesome! Thanks, Ms. Sanchez!"

"Thank you, Ms. Sanchez!"

With a smile, Dorothy clicked her heels back to her office and proceeded to order everyone's coffee as requested.

As she was about to pay, she noticed a fleeting notification on her phone - someone had added her.

After completing the payment, she checked again and saw that indeed, there was a new contact request. The verification message read: [Hey, it's Jeffrey. Are you heading to the resort or what?]

Chapter 810

Jeffrey was the last person she expected to friend-request her. She figured Karen must have slipped him her number. Hesitating for a moment, Dorothy clicked 'Accept.'

No sooner had she done so than a digital invitation popped up in my messages, all decked out in white and pink.

[Karen's folks gave us their blessing. We're tying the knot next month!]

[Seriously?]

She tapped as she quickly opened the invitation to find Karen and Jeffrey looking picture-perfect in their wedding attire. Talk about moving fast!

[Of course! You and Everett better be there, and Abigail and Langston are definitely going to be our ring bearer and flower girl.]

[Sure thing. I wouldn't miss Karen's big day for the world.]

Dorothy's eyes lingered on "Everett" for a beat too long. She actually wanted to ask Jeffrey when Everett was coming back to town, but something stopped her.

It felt almost like she didn't keep in touch with him so had to get the scoop from his buddy.

[Also, there's the resort thing! Karen's really looking forward to it. She wants you to come too. Don't be a party pooper and say no. She said once the baby comes, she won't have time for getaways. Everglow City's resort just opened up, and she's dying to check it out.]

Dorothy let out a sigh, her brows knitting together as she searched for a polite way to decline.

But before she could even type out a response, Jeffrey sent over the reservation confirmation.

[I booked the rooms already. Since you're on the fence, I made the executive decision for you.]

Well, that settled it.

Now she knew why Jeffrey and Karen could be such a perfect match.

To some extent, they were such a family. Both of them were action-takers, no dilly-dallying allowed.

She would think herself talking to Karen if she didn't know that was Jeffrey on the other side.

The old "act now, apologize later" tactic – Karen had pulled that on me more times than she could count back when they worked at Prosperity Consortium. She wanted to lounge around on weekends but Karen just went ahead and bought event tickets without asking.

She knew Dorothy all too well – if you left her with a choice, she'd always choose to bail. But once everything was set in stone, she was too polite to back out.

Well, might as well go with it.

After all, the days of Everett and her hanging out with Abigail and Langston were numbered. If he got a girlfriend, or heaven forbid, a wife, then their days of making public appearances together were really done.

The mood at the fourth project team's office was unusually upbeat, probably because everyone was looking forward to the long weekend. Everyone was head down and hard at work.

The assistant dropped in a few times with reports that were so well-organized that Dorothy barely needed to give them a second glance.

As soon as the clock signaled the end of the day, she hadn't even shut down her computer when cheers erupted from outside.

"Barbecue time!"

"We're going to make Austin pay big time today!"

"Damn right, I'm going for ten plates of that prime rib!"

Honestly, Dorothy loved the working atmosphere at Lopez Corp.

She quickly packed up and moved out. Some drove, some hailed cabs, but eventually, they all made it to the restaurant.

Dorothy knew Austin was trying to smooth things over between Ophelia and her. That was why he strategically seated the girl next to her.

It didn't bother Dorothy, though. Petty office politics were never her thing.

"Here's to you, Ms. Sanchez. I insist on a toast!"

"I really shouldn't—"

But Austin had already raised his glass, and her refusal was half out before she swallowed it back down, "Alright! Here's to Austin's leadership and to all my amazing colleagues! Here's to our project team pulling off a stellar job!"

She stood up, downed the drink in one go, and her cheeks instantly flushed a rosy hue.