

Midnight 821

Chapter 821

The silence in the car was thick enough to cut with a knife, and Dorothy felt a wave of awkwardness that made her skin crawl.

Usually, whenever Everett sensed her discomfort, he'd find a way to lighten the mood, but today, he didn't seem to have any intention of doing so.

It wasn't until they were almost at Bay Residence that he broke the silence again.

"Dorothy, should we maybe have a proper talk?" he asked.

He felt that they had never truly sat down to discuss their future or the whirlwind of events that had transpired between them.

It was always her with her thoughts, and him with his.

Everett had thought he had lost the right to ask Dorothy for a heart-to-heart, but that night, the vulnerability and love in her eyes were unmistakable, and he wasn't blind.

These past few days, he could recall her trembling voice calling out his name with his eyes shut, and it was such torture.

Work in Liberty City had kept him busy, and a bout of illness left him too drained to think of much else besides getting the kids to bed and crashing himself.

But the moment he was back in the country, their fiery encounter had kindled a huge desire he couldn't quell.

"What about?" Dorothy asked, not looking at him but picking at her nails.

"About us."

"Let's not talk right now," Dorothy rejected quickly. "At least I think we got nothing to talk about at this moment."

Everett frowned; he turned the wheel, pulling the car over to the side of the road.

"I'm not just bringing up the fact that we slept together!"

"I know."

"Dorothy, we can't go on like this."

"Everett," she sighed deeply, then spoke softly, "I want to wait until things have settled down before we talk, okay? Not now."

He pursed his lips tightly, obviously understanding her point.

"Fine, you tell me when." It was just a matter of waiting. He, Everett, could wait.

"When my mom's situation is resolved, if you don't bring it up, I will."

Everett seemed to have anticipated this response, his lips curling into a dry semblance of a smile.

"Alright, I'll wait for you." He said.

Dorothy never did look at him, because the plan she held in her heart was known to no one and couldn't be detected by anyone!

Everett was too sharp. If she let slip even the tiniest hint, he'd figure it out.

...

After picking up the kids and heading to the airport, Dorothy witnessed Karen wrapped around Jeffrey's neck, kissing him as if they couldn't bear to part.

She glanced at them and quickly turned away, blushing as she covered the children's eyes.

Everett, on the other hand, gave them a cold look and furrowed his brow as he took the luggage out of the car, "Jeffrey, you can leave us here."

Jeffrey was confused, "Huh? I'm coming with you guys, Everett!"

"You're acting like you're here to say goodbye."

Jeffrey pouted and leaned in to whisper, "Buddy, I'm laying it all on the line for you here! Getting Dorothy to agree is tough! You've got to seize the moment."

Everett, of course, hadn't mentioned to Jeffrey how he had ended up in bed with Dorothy on his first day back in the country.

So the look of bewilderment on Everett's handsome face was interpreted by Jeffrey as shyness.

"You've both got kids, and you're still having trouble wooing your wife? If I were you, I'd pin her down and charm her until she agrees to remarry. When she says yes, then you can stop!" As he spoke, Jeffrey seemed to be visualizing the scenario. He was squinting his eyes and chuckling, "Just fix everything on bed! Isn't that a popular way to do nowadays?"

"Is that how you won Karen back?"

"Pretty much!"

Chapter 822

Everett's fist connected with Jeffrey's jaw with a thud that echoed through the air.

"Ugh... What the hell, man?" Jeffrey stumbled backward, fighting for balance.

"That's for Karen's dad."

Jeffrey was taken aback.

Dorothy's head whipped around at the sound of Jeffrey's voice.

Karen, on the other hand, was the picture of composure. She hadn't caught their exchange, but she swiftly concluded that Jeffrey had it coming. "Serves him right!" she said.

"What are they on about?"

"How should I know!" Karen blinked innocently, "But if Everett's schooling Jeffrey, it's definitely for something Jeffrey did."

Dorothy chuckled with resignation, "You two are thick as thieves now, huh?"

They were always at each other's throats, but there was a straightforwardness about their relationship. A spat meant clearing the air, and once things were cleared up, they were back to being chums.

"What can I say? He's like a bad penny, always turning up! But honestly, when we first split, I really thought it was over between us."

"I know." It was clear to Dorothy.

Karen was nothing if not resilient, always ready to let go and move on.

"Enough about us. What about you and Everett? Jeffrey mentioned Everett came all the way back from Liberty City just to see you. He dropped a ton of work for this."

Dorothy paused, then met Karen's gaze, "We're... we're managing."

Karen patted her shoulder, nodding towards the two kids playing nearby.

"I don't care what other beef you and Everett have, but this vacation has been on my bucket list for ages, and who knows when the next one will be. So, no drama, please – at least don't let the kids know that you two are apart. Abigail is fine; she's only got her sweets in her eyes. But Langston's a smart cookie. He'll pick up on any tension."

Having grown up abroad with Kenneth, Langston had developed a certain independence and a keen sense of perception – something Dorothy was well aware of.

"Don't worry. Since I promised I'd come, I won't let the kids pick up on anything."

"Good, your word is all I need!"

With that, Karen pranced off to find Jeffrey.

Everett strode over, scooping Abigail into his arms and hoisting Langston onto a suitcase with one hand.

"Let's get going."

"Yeah." Dorothy nodded and fell into step with them.

After security, they found themselves in the airport's VIP lounge. Karen was engrossed in play with the kids and their new toys.

Langston, busily assembling his LEGO bricks, suddenly looked up.

He noticed his mom and dad standing far apart, hardly interacting, and it struck him as odd.

He tugged on Karen's sleeve, whispering in her ear, "Aunt Karen, are my mom and dad fighting?"

"Of course not!"

"But Dad always holds Mom's hand when he's not carrying anything. Why isn't he today?"

Karen glanced over, and even she couldn't deny the tension.

She could see the awkwardness transpired between them, which sent a discordant note in the air.

"Dorothy! Come here a sec!"

Karen beckoned, and Everett, thinking something was wrong with the children, followed suit.

"Langston, tell them what you told me," Karen urged.

Langston blinked, his lips pouting, "I think Dad doesn't love Mom anymore. He always held her hand before, but not today! Dad, are you looking for a new mom for Abigail and me?"

The bluntness of their son's words caught both Dorothy and Everett off guard.

Without giving much thought, they reached out at the same time, and their hands found each other's in grip.

Chapter 823

"Impossible, hon. I was just lost in thought for a second! Look, hand in hand now." Dorothy moved closer to Everett as if to reassure her son.

Everett also wrapped his arm around her with a charming grin, "Langston, haven't I told you before? There will never be a stepmom in your life. Let's drop that word, okay?"

Dorothy glanced at Everett. He didn't meet her eyes, but he could feel those astonished beams boring into him.

Soon, it was time to board the plane.

Dorothy expected Jeffrey to seat the kids next to herself and Everett, but instead—Abigail and Langston, along with Karen and Jeffrey, ended up in one row!

She and Everett were assigned seats together in the row behind.

"Karen, you're pregnant. Take care of yourself and don't let the kids bump into your belly!"

"Relax! I'm totally fine. Go on and take your seat." Karen waved her off, "Consider this early mom-training for me. If you and Everett stick around, I won't get my practice in, so go ahead."

Jeffrey too shooed them away before Dorothy could say a word, "Karen and I can totally handle the little rascals! I chose these seats with care, you know."

With no other choice, Dorothy made her way back to her seat.

Everett seemed to be still struggling with jet lag, his eyes closed, trying to catch some rest.

She could tell he was exhausted, the faint shadows beneath his closed lids a dead giveaway. Probably because he had pushed himself to return stateside early and left a pile of unfinished business that likely meant working nights and overtime.

Recalling how Everett had been under the weather, Dorothy reached out tentatively to check his forehead for fever.

But the moment her hand grazed his skin, Everett's grip snapped around her wrist. His eyes flew open, and after a few seconds, he let go.

"Sorry, I thought it was..." someone else.

“No worries.” Dorothy gave an awkward chuckle, “Go back to sleep. I won’t disturb you.”

She expected him to resume his nap, but Everett’s voice came low and steady.

“I got you the lawyer from West Legal Services.”

Dorothy paused. She was not so much surprised that he'd helped. She had actually thought about this possibility. She was just stunned by his out-of-the-blue statement.

“You owe me one, right?”

She nodded, “Yes, I do.”

Without that lawyer, her mother’s case wouldn't have progressed so quickly.

“So, can I make a request?”

“You put it that way so you knew I’d agree.”

He’d already brought up about the lawyer’s thing after all. This wasn’t like Everett, who preferred to help without seeking recognition.

He chuckled, his gaze fixed on her face, “How about we treat these seven days in Everglow City like Karen and Jeffrey, to have ourselves a little romance?”

A romance?

Dorothy looked at him.

“Since running into you again, all I’ve been thinking about is how to get you to marry me. Didn’t leave much room in the plan for you to consider, so...”

“So?”

“Dorothy, I’ve never really been dating someone in my whole life. I wanted to date you in middle school but I didn't succeed; when I grew up, I tried to chase you and realized you had too many eyes on you, and I had to hurry to get you. So I haven't been in a real relationship yet.”

She stared at him for a few seconds, then burst into laughter. “Everett, begging for love really doesn’t suit your style.”

When those forlorn words came from such a handsome man, they couldn’t be less convincing.

Chapter 824

"I've been begging for too long."

Some words, once you let them out, laced with half-truths and jokes, just tumble out easily.

"I really had no clue in middle school."

Back then, her mind was consumed with making money and finding more time for a part-time job while juggling studies. Puppy love? Never even crossed her mind.

Comparing her to Everett was laughable. Dorothy, in her second-hand uniform bought on the cheap from a graduating student, was the picture of drabness next to everyone else in the class. If they weren't mocking her behind her back, that was a good day. The idea that Everett, this prince on a pedestal, could have a crush on her? Absurd.

She truly believed that the teacher paired them up just so Everett could help her with her studies, especially with the important exams on the horizon.

"What if you knew? Would you have said yes to dating?"

"No. Didn't you ask me that already?"

"Yeah, and now I want to date."

Dorothy was at a loss for words.

"That favor you owe me, I want you to pay it back this way," Everett added.

He was shrewd, no doubt about it. Out of all the things he had secretly done for her, he picked the one where he helped her find a lawyer, which gave Dorothy no room to refuse.

Though the surveillance footage of Heather he got for her was also regarding her mother's case, mentioning it would only bring immediate awkwardness. However, the lawyer thing was different. Finding a capable lawyer to accept this case depended on Dorothy. It was not exactly Everett's duty, unlike the footage he felt obliged to provide.

"You wouldn't have asked if you knew I'd say yes."

"Are you angry?" Everett raised an eyebrow.

"No."

Dorothy wasn't, not really. She just found Everett amusing.

He could have simply said that it was for the kids' sake, and she would have agreed. There was no need for him to agonize over it and waste time racking his brain.

Everett reached out, took her hand, and reclined back, eyes closing.

"I didn't sleep last night. I'll take a nap. Wake me when we land."

"Sure."

She knew it!

With the time difference between Liberty City and back home, his early return meant burning the midnight oil.

The flight to Eldorria City from Everglow City wasn't long, but Dorothy stayed still, letting him hold her hand to sleep a bit longer.

When the plane began to descend, the subtle shift in gravity woke Everett.

"We there?"

"Yeah." Dorothy handed him a bottle of water from the tray table. "Time to get off the plane."

He took a sip, his gaze sweeping from Dorothy to the four people in the front row.

"They seem to be getting along."

"Abigail and Langston are used to being tossed around by me. They can play with anyone for a while."

That was a sore spot for Dorothy.

"You've raised them well," Everett said, aware of the morning sickness agony, like what Jeffrey had described about Karen's.

Dorothy shook her head. "I'm far from perfect compared to other parents."

"It hasn't stopped them from loving you, right?"

"That's true." Dorothy finally smiled. "I didn't expect them to accept you so quickly."

"I have my ways," he replied with a grin.

"Sure, sure," she nodded, playing along. "You're right, my boyfriend."

Chapter 825

In the dank basement where Heather was imprisoned, shadows clung to the walls like cobwebs. The air was heavy with the musty stench of dampness and decay.

She used to be confined in a house; at least there, she could bask in the sunlight, but for reasons unknown, she had been abruptly moved to this underground cell.

It was as if... they feared someone might find her.

Heather guessed Amanda was probably searching for her.

"I'm so cold... could I have another coat?" she asked, her fingers curling around the cold metal bars as she tried to negotiate with the guard outside her cell.

"Cold? You won't freeze to death!" the guard grunted dismissively.

"But if I get sick, that's on you, right?" Heather responded with a forced smile, injecting a hint of flirtation into her gaze, "Besides, it's not like there's anyone else around. Even if you give me a coat, who's gonna know?"

She had taken the measure of the two men guarding her. The one who had just left was tall and thin, introverted, always silent, with a perpetual scowl on his face - not the type to engage in conversation.

But this one, the shorter and rounder guard, was different. He would often tease his tall, thin colleague, even asking without any hint of shame if he had ever been with a woman!

The rotund guard glanced at her, obviously annoyed. "If I give you my coat, what am I supposed to wear?"

"Aren't men supposed to be all hot-blooded? You could... do some exercises to warm up!"

Exercises to warm up?

At a suggestion like that, any man's thoughts might wander off track.

"Oh, you're offering to sleep with me now?"

"I didn't say that. I just want to borrow a coat, that's all. Aren't you cold in this basement?" Heather countered.

The guard stood up from his chair and approached, feeling the back of her hand. Her skin wasn't as smooth and pale as before, but it was still soft to the touch, revealing her pampered past.

"So considerate, worrying about me being cold! Out with it, what do you really want? Don't take me for a fool who'd think you've suddenly taken a fancy to me!"

Heather chuckled lightly. "What could I possibly want from you? I just need a coat!"

"I'm not gonna waste words. I do want to sleep with you; there's nothing else to do down here. But let's get two things straight: first, I have no phone, and second, I can't contact the outside world. Don't get any ideas about that. If it's really just a coat you want, then fine, I've got a few spares in my room."

"I really just want a coat! I know you guys don't have phones."

Heather was well aware of Everett's meticulous planning. If he dared to lock her up here, this place was bound to be secure, and he would have taken every precaution to prevent her from bribing her way to the outside world.

"Alright! Then strip," the guard demanded.

Heather's face maintained a feigned coquettishness, but her hands were clenched into fists. She fought the urge to vomit that rose from the pit of her stomach!

She had once been pursued by countless men, many of whom were outstanding, but she had never given them the time of day, her heart set on staying true to Everett. And now... she was forced to degrade herself before this vile and foul-smelling guard!

"Strip!" he repeated.

Heather bit her lip, her voice trembling, "I told you I'm cold, and you're making me strip? Then come inside. You can help me."

The guard clicked his tongue. "I'm just checking out the goods, seeing if I like what you've got. I don't just take any woman. What if you've got a disease?"

Heather was at her breaking point. If it weren't for the slim hope of survival, she would never have consented!

"Fine, I'll strip, I'll strip..."

Chapter 826

Heather had been solitary for years, her romantic life as barren as a desert, save for one terrifying kidnapping...

Thus, this whole exchange had left her body aching from head to toe.

The stocky guard was nothing short of a sadist. He gnawed at her skin with a ferocity that sought to leave a mark, a stamp of his brutality.

As he attempted to pull out, Heather's legs clung to his waist with desperate strength.

"Don't go..."

"Fuck! Let go! You fucking..."

His protest was too late.

Moments later, both were panting heavily, sprawled on the cold floor of the dank basement.

After catching her breath, the guard, clearly not pleased, slapped her hard across the face and stood up. He locked the chain around her once more and left.

Lying there, staring at the moldy ceiling, Heather couldn't help but laugh bitterly.

"Think you can get rid of me that easily, Dorothy? Dream on!" She cursed inwardly.

She had to get pregnant, and fast. It didn't matter whose child it was. If she was carrying a baby when extradited back home, she wouldn't face the death penalty, no matter the sentence.

To be alive was to have a chance at everything.

...

The Everglow City Resort was a joint venture between Lopez Corporation and East Star Enterprises. Though East Star had since been absorbed by Lopez Corp, the names of both companies still graced the contractor's board at the entrance.

Dorothy was struck by nostalgia upon revisiting the resort.

The last time she had set foot here, the place was a construction site. Now, she returned as a visitor.

"Abigail and Langston, look, a Ferris wheel!" Karen exclaimed, her excitement surpassing even that of the kids.

At first, Jeffrey joined in the fun, but soon, he became her careful guardian, making sure she didn't run or jump too much.

The four of them were like kids let loose in a candy store, rushing from one attraction to another. Only Everett and Dorothy strolled leisurely behind, hand in hand.

"If we'd dated in middle school, we'd probably be walking like this around the schoolyard," Everett suddenly mused, indulging in a bit of fantasy.

Dorothy scoffed. "And get a day-long lecture from the dean? No thanks!"

She never dated in middle school, but she had heard the dean scolding young couples as she passed by his office.

Everett smirked. "He wouldn't dare."

Indeed, Everett was an exception at school. His family had clout, yet he never coasted on it. He was consistently at the top of his class, excelled in sports, and was charming to boot – the model student every teacher loved.

Even if he was found to be dating, he would, at most, get a warning.

"Ever miss those school days?" he asked.

Dorothy shook her head. "Not at all. Those days were too tough."

Winter clothes too thin, long walks to and from school, summers spent washing dishes by a sweltering stove in a diner kitchen.

"I've got regrets, you know," Everett suddenly said.

She stopped and looked up at him. "Oh?"

"I should've been by your side sooner," he said.

Not years of hesitation over a single letter. She could have been spared so much hardship.

"Everett, the fact that you came at all is more than I could've hoped for."

It was a luxury Dorothy never allowed herself to dream of.

Squeezing her hand tighter, he pulled her close. "Then, Dorothy... how about spending a lifetime with me?"

Chapter 827

Dorothy's body quivered, her voice muffled. "Just wait a bit longer. I'll give you an answer."

"Okay."

In the distance, Jeffrey shouted their way, "Hey, keep up! Karen's saying she's starving and fancies some barbecue!"

"Coming!" Dorothy hurriedly extracted herself from his embrace; her cheeks tinged with a bashful glow.

She was still not quite accustomed to public displays of affection with Everett, especially in front of friends—it always felt a bit off.

But he seemed so at ease with it, casually taking her hand as they walked forward together.

It kind of felt like that sweet, electrifying rush of young love.

The resort was sprawling, divided into several thematic areas, and they had only explored three spots when Karen, along with Abigail and Langston, began to complain about being tired.

Glancing at her watch, Dorothy knew it was almost nap time for the kids. Plus, Karen was already a bit of a sleepyhead, clearly just trying to power through.

"Should we head back for a rest? I'm beat, too."

Dorothy stepped up and gently lifted Abigail, who was fighting off sleep with every blink, into her arms.

Everett kept pace, lifting his son beside him. "Sounds good. Let's head back."

The consensus was unanimous, and Jeffrey secured a resort cart to take them back to their hotel accommodations.

Since the resort was newly opened, it was bustling with tourists.

As they got out of the cart, their little group attracted quite a few glances.

Dorothy instinctively shielded Abigail's face, quickening her pace.

Everett, ever the protector, was quick to follow, and in a swift move, he was inside Dorothy's room.

Dorothy settled the now-snoozing Abigail down and was about to tend to Langston when she realized Everett was right behind her.

Startled for a moment, Dorothy said, "Jeffrey... he got you a separate room."

"Yeah, I'll help you get the kids settled first."

Langston, not yet asleep, got the gist and immediately waved them off. "I don't need tucking in. You go ahead with Mom!"

He was used to being with his sister, taking care of her with practiced ease. Abigail was easy to soothe; a cartoon would keep her content, and if she got cranky, a single candy would do the trick.

Langston himself never cared much for sweets, saving the treats his parents also bought for him to coax a smile from his sister.

Her son's innocent comment sent a blush creeping across Dorothy's cheeks.

To Abigail and Langston, she and Everett were the picture of a loving couple, always sharing a room when it was time to sleep.

"Planning to sneak in some computer games?" Everett, not looking at Dorothy, settled Langston into another kiddie bed, "Nope, eyes closed and off to sleep."

Langston pouted. "Fine!"

Dorothy breathed a sigh of relief; with Everett around, she could change clothes and organize her luggage without worry.

Everglow City was warmer than Eldorria City, so she could shed the long sleeves that were starting to stick uncomfortably to her skin.

After freshening up and reapplying her makeup, she was just stepping out of the bathroom when she saw Everett leaning casually against the door frame, watching her.

"Is Langston asleep?"

She hadn't noticed when he arrived or whether he had been watching her apply makeup, which made her a bit self-conscious.

Everett didn't answer her question but walked over, grasped her wrist, and pressed her between the cool bathroom tiles and his chest.

The chill from the tiles made Dorothy instinctively want to move away, only to find herself even closer to his body.

"Everett, what are you—mmhm!"

Chapter 828

His kiss caught her completely off guard, sealing her lips in a sudden embrace.

Dorothy could only clutch at his shirt, tilting her head back to savor the warmth of his lips.

This kiss was different from the others; Everett was gentle, as if afraid he would break her, starting with a tender peck and gradually deepening...

When the kiss ended, he didn't let go of Dorothy, merely pulling back slightly.

"Dolled up for someone special, huh?" he teased.

Flushed and unable to meet his gaze, she mumbled, "I just thought... you know, for a trip, one ought to... spruce up a bit..."

"Not for me?"

"Definitely not."

Everett smirked. "Then you're confined to this room today."

Dorothy blinked. "Why?"

"If it's not for me, then no one else gets a look."

"That bossy? Mr. Lopez, been binge-reading those CEO romance novels lately?"

He raised an eyebrow. "You into that?"

Shaking her head, she replied, "Not really."

But her friend Karen sure was! Especially the steamy ones, and she would pull Dorothy aside at The Prosperity Consortium the next day to rave about them.

So... Dorothy had skimmed a few.

"Do you like roses?"

She pondered for a moment, then shook her head again. "Not particularly."

Everett frowned, his long fingers tilting her chin to force her eyes to his. "Then why accept the roses from Kenneth?"

"You know about that too?"

"So you knew they were from Kenneth, huh?"

Dorothy realized she had walked right into his trap and pouted.

"I found out later... At first, I thought they were from you."

"You told me not to send them."

As if he couldn't afford a bunch of flowers.

What was Kenneth's gift compared to him? He could fill the entire project team's office with roses!

"I didn't know he would send them! He didn't even tell me, just sent them over."

In that, Dorothy felt wronged.

Of course, Everett trusted that she wouldn't have asked Kenneth for flowers.

"How did he even know you like them?"

"Somebody at The Lopez Corporation forum snapped a photo of me, and Karen, without thinking much, shared it with me and showed Kenneth too."

Who would have guessed Kenneth would make such a move?

Dorothy suddenly narrowed her eyes at him. "Everett, you didn't rush back because you heard Kenneth sent me flowers, did you?"

"Can you not mention Kenneth in every other sentence?" Dorothy found herself both annoyed and amused. This man could be so childish!

"Because I only see him as a friend, just Karen's cousin. Do you want me to see you just as a friend, too?"

Everett pursed his lips, falling silent.

Speaking of which, Dorothy had to commend the swift moderation on The Lopez Corporation forum.

They were quite quick with deleting posts!

"By the way, is there someone managing the forum? My post got deleted so quickly! And all the related content was gone, too!" She commented.

Then, Dorothy suddenly realized and asked Everett, "Did you do that?"

"I just figured you wouldn't want your personal business floating around the office."

She frowned slightly. "You're halfway across the world in Liberty City, and you're keeping up with every detail about me? Mr. Lopez, you should be focused on your work!"

He snorted softly. "There are too many people thinking about you; I wish I could focus."

Just when he took his eyes off for a moment, another man's roses had been delivered straight to her office!

Chapter 829

Dorothy smoothed the worry lines creasing Everett's brow with a gentle touch.

"Mr. Lopez, you should know I'm not easily swayed. Did you really think a single rose would do the trick?"

There was no point for him to be worried about those things! She had already made it clear that there was nothing more than friendship between her and Kenneth, yet Everett refused to accept it, always on guard.

"I saw the forum posts; you've got quite the fan club wanting to get to know you."

"You went through those?"

"Just glanced over them during the meeting."

Quite the "glance," huh?

Drawing in a deep breath, Dorothy recalled Karen's words, "Men are just boys in grown bodies." That saying couldn't be more accurate.

"Abigail and Langston are fast asleep. Why don't you head back and catch some z's? Karen and Jeffrey are bound to have more plans for the night."

She was concerned about him pulling an all-nighter when he was still under the weather. Seeing how he didn't take care of himself, her heart ached.

"Go back... and sleep? Without you?" Everett raised an eyebrow, playfully emphasizing 'go back' as he wrapped his arms around her.

"It's not right... leaving Abigail and Langston here alone."

"Langston can take care of Abigail. Besides, my room is just across the hall."

Everett had noticed it the moment they arrived. He knew precisely what his good friend had in mind—convenience for, perhaps a midnight rendezvous.

Jeffrey might as well have given Dorothy's room key to him.

"Everett, this isn't right, is it?"

"What's not right with it? You're my girlfriend now, aren't you? You agreed to it."

Everett may not have mastered Jeffrey's aggressive tactics in love, but he certainly had picked up a thing or two about being stubborn.

He had put his pride on the line, even calling in favors, so he was determined to make every bit count.

Dorothy was about to protest when she found herself swept up in Everett's arms.

"Don't worry, we're just going to sleep for a bit."

Some things were better left for the night...

...

In the basement, Heather had only intended to use the stocky man as a means to survive. But she hadn't anticipated that this was the start of her nightmare!

That evening, it was supposed to be the tall, thin man watching her, but the short, stocky one insisted on taking over.

Once alone, he unlocked the door and tore at Heather's clothes!

"What are you doing? Let me go!"

"Let you go? Weren't you all over me before? Don't you know what I want?"

When Heather tried to resist, he slapped her across the face with such force her cheek immediately swelled.

Taking advantage of her dazed state, he forced himself on her.

"I heard you were once the belle the Lopez family wanted to marry off."

Heather clenched her teeth, refusing to utter a word.

The man hated her silence, grabbing her hair and forcing her to look at him.

"Deaf, are you? Can't hear me?"

"Let go of me! It hurts!"

"You know pain? Then take care of me, make me feel good, or else... the orders from above are clear: anything goes as long as you don't end up dead."

A flicker of shock crossed Heather's eyes. "Orders from above? Whose orders? Everett's?"

"Whoever sent you here, that's who!"

Chapter 830

"No way, no way! Everett wouldn't let anyone treat me like trash..."

The man chuckled. "Me, treating you like trash? Wasn't it you who lured me in? You women crack me up, you know? When you need something from me, you're all over me, and when you're done, you say I'm the one disrespecting you! Pfft!"

He was a rough man, and if she said he was mistreating her, then he would show her what mistreatment really felt like!

Maybe it was the force behind that slap he had just delivered, or perhaps the despair of knowing this was all under Everett's orders. Either way, Heather felt a buzzing in her ears, rendering her deaf to the world.

Her body, being pinched and bitten by the man, couldn't even register the pain anymore!

One thought dominated her mind—the knife she had driven into Everett should have been more forceful, more brutal! So severe that he couldn't have survived, so grave that he would have died on the spot!

Then, she wouldn't have to suffer like this, wouldn't have to struggle so desperately to keep living.

If Everett were dead, she would have no more attachment to this world.

To follow Everett in death would have been her heart's desire.

...

And as Dorothy had predicted, the moment she and Everett woke up, Karen was already clamoring for a backyard barbecue in the group chat!

Karen: [Are you guys still asleep? What time is it?!]

Karen: [If you don't wake up soon, I'm gonna come looking for you in your room!]

Jeffrey : [Everett was up all night; they had a marathon meeting; let him sleep a little longer! I'll be right back with the BBQ goodies! Got your favorite tri-tip.]

Karen: [Oh, OKOK! Love ya~]

The last message was sent thirteen minutes ago.

Dorothy quickly got out of bed and freshened up, and as she and Everett opened the door to Abigail and Langston's room. They were already wide awake, playing happily.

"Mommy, Daddy! Hug!" Abigail, as always, was the most affectionate.

"We're going to have a barbecue. Come on, mommy will take you."

Everett stood behind his wife and children, a hint of a smile on his lips.

He immediately declared that Everglow City, this resort, was his favorite getaway.

The family of four made their way out of the hotel, and Jeffrey had already picked out the perfect spot for the backyard barbecue! This place used to be the construction project site for the Lopez Corporation, and now that it had been cleared, it was an open field.

Though there was no lawn, the ground was even, ideal for the kids to run and play.

"Wow! This smells amazing. I love this BBQ sauce!" Karen exclaimed the moment she saw the texture of the sauce.

Dorothy sat down next to her and softly warned, "You shouldn't have too much. It's not good for pregnant women."

"It's fine, it's fine! Jeffrey's kid is tough as nails; a little barbecue isn't going to hurt!"

"Still, better be careful."

"Dorothy, you're starting to sound like my mom!"

Dorothy sighed in resignation. She really turned into an old mother! After all, Karen would be too reckless without her constant reminders! Today, she even dared to run and jump on the lawn with Abigail and Langston!

Just as Dorothy was about to continue, her peripheral vision caught Everett approaching.

He was carrying a bouquet of roses that was twice the size of the one Kenneth had brought. It was so heavy he had to cradle it with both arms.

Dorothy raised her hand to rub her temples.

Men and their ridiculous sense of competition...