

## Midnight 851

### Chapter 851

"I haven't been in touch with Tristan for, like, centuries, I told him that!"

As Karen's temper began to flare, Dorothy quickly stepped in to soothe her.

"Hey, hey, easy, Karen. If not for anything else, think about the bun in the oven, huh? The doc says you need to chill and take care of yourself, or else..."

Karen pursed her lips tightly, and then, after a long pause, she let out a soft sigh. "If only Jeffrey could be half as level-headed as Everett. Sometimes I swear that guy's still in short pants."

If anyone else had said that, Dorothy would've nodded in agreement.

But coming from Karen...

"You're not exactly the picture of maturity yourself compared to Jeffrey."

They were like two kids playing house.

Karen pouted. "Well, at least I don't go around throwing punches like he does, acting all innocent afterward! Every time he does that, it feels like we're worlds apart."

Jeffrey had zero respect for others, let alone any kind of moral compass. If he liked someone, they could do no wrong in his eyes. But if he didn't? He'd run them into the ground.

Karen was afraid that one day, Jeffrey's ways would lead to disaster.

"Don't get all worked up. No matter what, Jeffrey cares about you, and that's enough."

"Dorothy, do you think Jeffrey and I will make it to the end? I'm really... I just have no clue."

"Who can tell these things? You just keep walking the path to find out." Dorothy offered a comforting smile.

"Like me and Everett, do you think we'll last?"

Karen blinked, taken aback. "I guess... You guys seem so in love."

But Dorothy shook her head. "I don't think so."

Yet, she hoped they would.

So everything was uncertain, and she neither wanted to nor could she conclude anything.

...

Outside the hospital room.

Jeffrey followed Everett out reluctantly, looking thoroughly dejected.

"Everett, what's up? Spit it out, will you? I gotta get back to Karen and make things right."

"Think about what you're gonna say first, then go back." Everett knew Jeffrey all too well. "The doctor said Karen can't have any more emotional fluctuations."

"She can hit me and scold me all she wants! As long as she's not mad afterward."

"You're still not getting it." Everett massaged his temples. "Think about why you and Karen always end up fighting."

Jeffrey furrowed his brow, genuinely pondering.

"It's because of that Tristan guy! Can you believe it? He confessed his feelings for Karen right in front of me! Like I was six feet under or something!"

What guy could handle that kind of provocation?

"But Karen doesn't like it when you get physical."

That was the crux of the issue.

"I know she hates it, but I can't control myself!" Jeffrey glanced at Everett and grimaced. "I gotta hand it to you, though. When it comes to patience, I could learn a thing or two from you."

Everett frowned. "Learn what from me?"

"To be like you! You even put up with Kenneth! I could never stand having a rival like that around my girl all the time! If it were me, I'd have knocked Kenneth into next week."

Everett paused for a moment, his voice growing heavy. "You think I don't want to?"

Chapter 852

Jeffrey's eyes bulged; he blinked furiously for a long moment before he pursed his lips in frustration.

"Even you can only barely keep your cool, so of course, I couldn't stand by when Tristan started his nonsense!"

He honestly hadn't expected things to escalate like this!

Thank goodness Karen's baby was alright. Otherwise...

Jeffrey felt like he could kick himself.

The two men stood out like sore thumbs in the hospital corridor, drawing curious glances from passersby.

Fortunately, Dorothy soon emerged from the hospital room.

"Karen's asleep."

"I'll go keep watch over her!" Jeffrey was ready to barge into the room.

Dorothy instinctively wanted to remind him of something, but Everett cut in before she could speak. "Let them work it out. Relationships need to go through some friction. It's not something we can fix by talking too much."

"Alright then."

Dorothy wasn't one to meddle too much in other people's affairs anyway. She was just worried about the baby Karen was carrying.

But since Everett had spoken, he must have already had a word with Jeffrey.

"Let them take their time. Shall we head back?"

Abigail and Langston were still at the resort hotel.

Dorothy nodded. "Yeah."

...

The trip was initially planned for a week, but with Karen's emergency, nobody felt like continuing the vacation. And since she needed to stay in the hospital, the holiday was cut short.

They decided to fly Karen back to Eldorria City, where she could have access to better medical facilities.

Jeffrey had already arranged a top-notch medical team to escort her from the airport. To an outsider, it might have looked like she had a severe illness.

Seeing how carefully Jeffrey was taking care of Karen, Dorothy finally felt relieved.

...

Kevin drove them back to Bay Residence and then headed back to the office.

After playing with Abigail and Langston for a while, Dorothy stepped out of the playroom to find Everett with furrowed brows, apparently in a tough phone call.

Catching sight of her, Everett spoke in a hushed tone and ended the call. "Are you hungry?"

"I ate plenty on the plane; I'm good." Dorothy approached him and softly asked, "Is it something to do with Liberty City?"

Everett paused before nodding. "Yeah, there's a situation I need to handle."

"Go take care of it," she said, looking him in the eye earnestly. "I told you, let me handle my part on my own, don't get involved."

"I still don't like the idea of you dealing with it alone. Why don't you come with me to Liberty City?"

"Everett, your boyfriend experience voucher has expired."

Everett was at a loss for words.

She chuckled. "We should go back to our own lives."

Everett gazed into her eyes and suddenly stepped closer, forcing her to meet his stare.

"Have you really decided to push me away?"

"Everett, she's your mother."

"But we..."

"There will be other girls you like besides me. You just haven't met them yet. But if you betray the Lopez family for me, you will be condemned by everyone. I don't want that."

Everett just stared at her face, unblinking. Suddenly, he smiled. "Do you even know what you're talking about?"

"I do."

"Dorothy! You've pushed me away too many times. Think it over, because I won't keep coming back to you!"

He thought... He thought that this time, she had changed her attitude.

Chapter 853

Dorothy lingered in silence so long that she feared the voice that would eventually break it wouldn't even sound like her own.

"Then... don't come back."

Everett remained silent.

"Everett, go back to where you belong," she added.

He clenched his fists so tightly that the veins on the back of his hands stood out like angry rivers.

"How do you do it? How can you say something so heartless without batting an eyelash? Huh?"

His voice was hoarse, dripping with despair.

Dorothy had a knack for smashing his slowly gathered courage, his glimmers of hope, into oblivion, leaving nothing behind!

And just moments ago, everything was fine. They were holding hands in the cab back from the airport!

"Because I'm just a rock, I don't have warmth," Dorothy replied, her gaze piercing through him as she enunciated every word. "You should've known this by now. I'm incapable of love; I only stick to my convictions."

"I never asked you to change!" He had been trying his whole life to reshape himself! He was chiseling away, just hoping to fit into the mold she desired.

"But I truly don't want to respond to your feelings anymore. I'm exhausted. And Everett, doesn't it bother you?" Dorothy inhaled deeply, deciding to lay it all out. "Your father came to see me. Even though I didn't admit it, I think you knew. The photos he showed me, you've seen them, haven't you?"

Everett's lips pressed into a thin line. "Yes."

"Then, that day after you saw them, I noticed something off about you." Dorothy's smile was a twisted mimicry of warmth. "Tell me the truth, were you also trying to convince me to drop the criminal charges against your mother?"

"Yes..." He had considered it.

Because they were just one step away, just one! The Lopez family was finally ready to accept Dorothy. They could be together at last, and he could proudly claim Dorothy as his own, proclaim her to everyone!

To say he wasn't tempted would be a lie.

"I won't drop the charges," said Dorothy.

"I know."

That was why he hadn't voiced it.

"What do you know? You know nothing! This is exactly why I always see you as the opposition!"

Dorothy's nails dug into her flesh, grounding her enough to get the words out. "I can trust Karen, even Kenneth completely, because their parents aren't involved in this mess. But you, you're different! It was your mother who deliberately murdered the last of my kin! And then you ask me to trust you, to be with you? Don't you see how absurd that is?"

Everett's lips quivered. "I never once helped my mother in this..."

Even after those photos shook him, even when his father Jonathan's offer was tempting, he hadn't spoken a single word in his mother's defense.

"So what, I should be grateful? Overlook all the animosity and be with you? Everett, there's no reconciliation. Even if you killed your mother with your own hands, it won't change the fact that you are her son."

Just like now...

The Lopez family, despite their influence, couldn't change the fact that Everett's mother murdered Bella.

What's done is done.

"If that's what you truly think, then why did you go on vacation with me? Why did you share a bed with me?" Everett was desperate, grasping at her arms as if he were clinging to life itself. "There's still a part of you that's mine, right?"

"Yes." Dorothy knew denying it outright would be futile. "But honestly, the way you treat me, it's exhausting, it's suffocating."

Chapter 854

Everett's grip was unwavering, a silent sentinel refusing to release her.

At this moment, this man was unable to hide his desperation and pleading despite his best efforts to conceal them.

Everett knew that if a crack appeared in his tightly wound emotions, there would be no way to reel them back in.

He was clinging to the last shred of his dignity. That was until faint laughter from the children's room drifted over...

In an instant, as if his strength had been siphoned away, Everett staggered forward, pulling Dorothy into a fierce embrace.

"What about the kids? We've got kids; can't you think about them?"

Dorothy struggled a few times, aiming to break free from his hold. But he was relentless, crazed almost, pressing her against him to feel the heartbeat in his chest.

"Everett, the kids... I've left them with the Lopez family. I've signed an agreement with your father."

"You're giving up on Abigail and Langston, too?"

"Yes." Dorothy's reply was crisp as if fearing a second's delay would render her unable to speak again.

"Everett, I no longer want anything to do with the Lopez family. Let me go, please."

Everett didn't budge, but he no longer applied force.

With a gentle push, Dorothy easily set herself free. "Everett..."

"Just go." He didn't look up, his body frozen in the previous pose, his voice calm. "Go, leave now."

"Alright." Dorothy didn't say goodbye; she just walked straight out of Bay Residence.

In Everett's eyes, her request upon returning from Eldorria City seemed abrupt, but in truth on the flight back, Dorothy had made up her mind.

She had to separate from Everett.

...

After leaving Bay Residence, Dorothy didn't return to Karen's apartment. Instead, she went straight to Bella's grave site.

Along the way, she picked up a bouquet. Bella was never fond of white; she preferred pink, but she never admitted it.

Perhaps for Bella, the choices of her youth had brought a lifetime of suffering, causing her to detest everything about those years.

Dorothy bought pink roses.

When she arrived at the cemetery, the sky was clear, but soon after her arrival, it began to cloud over. It looked like rain was on its way.

"Mom, I'm here to see you." Dorothy placed the flowers down and slowly knelt before the gravestone.

"I'm sorry... I couldn't heed your advice, and I fell for the son of the man who killed you. I know if you were still here, you'd scold me fiercely! But what can I do? I can't control myself."

Dorothy lowered her gaze and pulled out a lawsuit notification from her bag, placing it in front of the gravestone.

"Mom, the trial has begun. Rest assured, whether I win or lose, I'm prepared for either."

After speaking, she took a deep breath, her eyes reddening, fighting back the tears with several blinks.

"If the court grants me a fair trial and sentences them to the ultimate penalty, I might have to continue defying your teachings. I'll go after Everett because I love him.

If not... then I'll take matters into my own hands. I will make sure they both meet you! It's my duty as your daughter."

So, right now, she couldn't give Everett any answers. Nor could she ask Everett to intervene and demand a death sentence for his mother.

All she could do was push Everett away, let him return to his rightful place, and wait for the outcome.

## Chapter 855

Everett took off to Liberty City the next day with Abigail and Langston in tow.

Dorothy's life suddenly felt like a throwback to her days at the Prosperity Consortium. Her world narrowed down to her apartment and the office — a very predictable routine.

Only on weekends, there was no longer a need to visit Bella at the hospital.

The Lopez Corporation's projects were moving along as scheduled. Sure, there were hiccups here and there, but nothing that teamwork couldn't iron out.

Before she knew it, winter had given way to a stealthy spring.

Eldorria City's weather couldn't make up its mind, swinging from rain to snow, leaving everyone baffled about what to wear.

Karen's baby bump was starting to show, and she had put on a noticeable amount of weight. She was the picture of a little mama-to-be, hands constantly supporting her lower back as she walked.

Her wedding with Jeffrey was postponed. There was no helping it; they didn't want to wear her out, and the doctor advised bed rest during this critical phase of pregnancy.

"Dorothy, why don't you come over for some barbecue after work today?" Karen's voice came through the phone.

Even with the doctor's orders to rest, Karen couldn't sit still.

If she couldn't go out, people would just have to come to her!

Dorothy answered the call while printing out the latest project report, ready to submit it shortly.

"I might be late today. You and Jeffrey start without me!"

"We haven't seen each other in a week, and I miss you! Just come over; I'll wait up no matter how late," Karen whined.

Boredom was her constant companion these days. Even with Jeffrey's company, seeing the same handsome face day in and day out could become tiresome.

"Alright," Dorothy couldn't resist her friend's pleading. "If you get hungry, eat first. I'll contact you after work."

"Deal!"

After hanging up, Dorothy handed the printed documents to Austin.

"Everyone's been working hard on the project. There's been no delay, and I've made sure the progress reports are accurate."

Austin nodded, giving the papers a cursory glance before fixing his gaze on Dorothy. "Say, Ms. Sanchez... you're about to resign, right?"

Dorothy paused, then nodded. "Yes, but it's not for a while yet. Why do you ask?"

"Well, just checking! After all, we need someone to fill your shoes, right? What's going to happen to the project otherwise?"

"The company should appoint a replacement," Dorothy affirmed. Everett... he must be aware of her resignation date.

"That's the usual procedure, but so far, there's been no word! And considering you'll be leaving soon, we're still in the dark," sighed Austin.

He then added in a negotiating tone, "Ms. Sanchez, how about this? If the company doesn't send a replacement by the time you're set to leave, would you stay on and oversee the project until they do?"

Dorothy frowned slightly. "That wouldn't be appropriate. Once I resign, my contract with the company is terminated. I shouldn't be involved in the project as a director. If you're worried about the transition, it might be best to inquire about the company's plans in advance."

"Alright then," Austin conceded, seeing her determination. "You can get back to your tasks. That's all for now."

"Okay."

Leaving Austin's office, Dorothy returned to her desk and noticed a new WhatsApp message on her phone screen.

It was from Kenneth.

[Dorothy, I'm going on a blind date today. Do you think this girl and I look like a match? My mom insists we're meant to be!]

She opened the photo and looked.

The girl in the photo had a gentle demeanor with a clean, sweet smile.

[Kenneth, you better make the most of this. She seems perfect for you, and your mom's right!]

[If you say so too, then I've got to spruce myself up. Here's hoping I can bring her home and make her my wife.]

Chapter 856

Kenneth had finally found his groove, and Dorothy couldn't help but feel genuinely happy for him.

Deep down, she really hoped he'd stumble upon someone who'd be his perfect match.

Knowing that Karen was waiting, Dorothy decided to put off some non-urgent work until tomorrow. She hurried off to Jeffrey's estate.

"Dorothy's here! Jeffrey, go open the door for her." Karen's voice boomed from inside, its strength unaltered even by her pregnancy.

The sound of slippers shuffling closer preceded the opening of the door. There stood Jeffrey, clad in cozy home wear, his hair a casual mess, holding a tiny pink garment in his hand.

"Dorothy! You're just in time. Take a look at these hideous baby clothes Jeffrey picked out. Why are guys so clueless when it comes to shopping?"

Dorothy glanced at Jeffrey's expression, which bore no hint of offense – he seemed utterly accustomed to Karen's ribbing – and she relaxed.

"Don't be too harsh on him. You might hurt his feelings."

"He won't mind," Karen quipped, though she continued showing each piece of clothing to Dorothy with evident excitement for her impending motherhood.

"Now that Dorothy's here, should I get the kitchen to start on the fondue?" Jeffrey interjected, neatly folding the previously scattered clothes.

"Sure, go ahead!" Karen waved him off with the air of a duchess directing her butler.

Once Jeffrey was out of earshot, Dorothy whispered, "Don't be too hard on him. Jeffrey's been pampered all his life, and here you are treating him like he's the help."

"He asked for it. I turned him down so many times, and he just wouldn't have the breakup. What can I do?" Karen smirked, her hand resting naturally on her belly.

"Besides, I've got to train him now, so he's ready to take care of me and the baby when the time comes."

Dorothy thought about it and had to agree. She was always the worrywart. If the couple was happy with their arrangement, who was she to judge?

"What about you?" asked Karen.

"Me? Just the usual grind at work, you know that."

Karen slapped her leg playfully. "I'm not asking about your job. I mean, you and..."

Dorothy hesitated, a wry smile on her lips. "No contact."

"Not at all?"

Dorothy nodded.

Everett hadn't even sent her videos of Abigail and Langston anymore.

Complete radio silence.

"Do you think Everett has really given up on you?" Karen asked, her lips pursed.

"Dorothy, what are you thinking? I mean, Jeffrey and Everett talk, but only about work. Whenever they chat off-topic, your name never comes up. I've even snooped on their messages – all business."

"If he's given up, isn't that a good thing?"

"Good? Are you kidding? Everett's stacked. He could snap his fingers and have a line of women ready to remarry. What then?"

Dorothy paused, her voice soft. "I'd wish him well."

Karen smacked her forehead without mercy. "Wish him well? So you'd be okay with some other woman becoming Abigail and Langston's stepmom?"

"Karen, I pushed him away. More than once. He's under no obligation to wait for me."

## Chapter 857

"So, how's your lawsuit going? Any progress?" Karen asked, pausing her movements as she flipped a pancake.

"Yeah," Dorothy nodded, her voice steady. "The preliminary hearing is coming up."

Karen's hand froze mid-flip. "Has Everett's mom been detained?"

"No, but the trial can proceed without her. The court has already issued the summons."

Karen's mouth hung open for a moment, struggling to find the words. "You've really come to this... Everett's mom is just vile! Without her, you and Everett could have been such a happy couple."

Everett wasn't like Jeffrey, all rash and impulsive. He was career-driven, responsible, and always thorough. He would have taken care of Dorothy well.

"There are no 'what-ifs'."

From the last time she walked away from Bay Residence, Dorothy had made up her mind.

If Bella had followed Maxton Sanchez's wishes back then, she wouldn't even exist, let alone all that followed!

Without her, maybe Bella would have remarried, found happiness sooner, and escaped the shadow of that scumbag, not ending up dying alone from an overdose.

Her life was owed to her mother; it was she who had burdened Bella.

So whether it was seeing justice served through legal means or taking matters into her own hands, that was Dorothy's priority.

All other disputes and grievances were secondary.

"What about after the lawsuit? Once you get the outcome you're looking for, will you..."

"I might," Dorothy cut her off, knowing what Karen was about to ask.

"If Everett's still single by then, I guess I should get a taste of what it's like to pursue him after all these years he's been after me."

It was another debt to repay.

Karen's eyes widened comically. "You, chasing after him?"

Dorothy coughed awkwardly, a sheepish smile on her face. "Is it that surprising?"

"Yes," Karen nodded earnestly. "But I'd love to see it."

Dorothy tugged at her lip. "Don't get your hopes up. I can't even picture what I'd look like chasing someone!"

Karen clicked her tongue, letting out a sigh.

"Yeah, I guess. I mean, I can see you talking a big game about pursuing someone, but the minute Everett says something even slightly harsh, you'd probably shrink back to where he can't see you and then bless him with some ridiculous well wishes! Dorothy, you just don't have that relentless grip that Everett has."

Karen knew Dorothy too well. Taking the initiative was not in her nature.

Even when Karen had wanted to befriend Dorothy, it took a lot of warm persistence and many cold shoulders before Dorothy finally opened up.

"The fondue's ready!" Before Dorothy could respond, Jeffrey called from the kitchen.

"Great, let's eat. I'm starving," Karen said, trying to sit up, but Jeffrey was already there, lifting her in his arms.

"Don't move, I'll carry you."

Karen blushed slightly, glancing at Dorothy. "Dorothy's still here!"

"So what? We're married."

Dorothy quickly interjected, "Just pretend I'm not here. I'm blind to it all."

As long as the two of them were getting along fine, that was all that mattered.

After dinner at Jeffrey's, Dorothy stayed for a chat with Karen until it got too late, and she didn't want to impose any further.

"Let Jeffrey drive you home!" Karen insisted.

"No need, I can take a cab back," Dorothy replied.

"Not at this time of night," Karen turned to Jeffrey. "You go, make sure Dorothy gets home safe."

With a nod, Jeffrey grabbed his keys and looked at Dorothy. "Let's go."

## Chapter 858

Had it not been for Karen's worrying, Dorothy might have outright refused the ride in Jeffrey's car.

It wasn't personal—she just felt awkward alone with any man who wasn't Everett. There was something about it that made her skin crawl, a discomfort she couldn't quite shake off.

So, she sat silently in the back seat, her gaze fixed on the parade of neon signs that streaked past the window, their colors dancing across her face.

Jeffrey seemed to get it. He didn't push for conversation, respecting her quiet mood.

At a red light, he glanced at Dorothy through the rear-view mirror, cleared his throat hesitantly, and finally spoke up.

"Did you hear about Everett putting the Bay Residence on the market?"

Dorothy's hand twitched. She met his eyes in the mirror and shook her head slightly.

"No, we haven't been in touch."

"He texted me last week and asked me to handle the sale of the place."

"Oh."

Jeffrey frowned, dissatisfied with her indifferent response. "What went down between you two after you got back from Everglow City?"

He wasn't one to gossip, but curiosity was eating at him.

As Everett's friend, Jeffrey knew all too well how much Everett cared for Dorothy.

They'd had their fair share of conflicts and arguments. Everett had claimed to move on more than once, but at the slightest hint of Dorothy's presence, he'd come running back.

But now...

Selling the Bay Residence?

Jeffrey was certain Dorothy understood what that meant.

"I told him to leave me alone."

"That's it?"

"Yeah."

Jeffrey snorted softly. "I don't buy it."

Dorothy looked down, replaying the conversation in her head. She really hadn't said much, just... once again chose to push him away.

"Dorothy, do you even love Everett? Because you're really dragging him through the mud."

Her eyes drifted outside, avoiding the question.

Since Jeffrey had broached the subject, he pressed on, "I know his mom's been a thorn in your side, making things tough for you both. But when you're together, you can fix it! There was no need to be so harsh, to break his heart."

"It's not fixable."

Dorothy wouldn't entangle herself with Everett any longer.

The outcome of the upcoming court case would determine whether she had a future at all.

She was tired, too tired to even think about all the things weighing on her.

Sometimes, she even wished for a swift verdict, win or lose, just to have closure. Even if it meant losing, at least she could face her mother's murderer with clear intent and meet her own end without regret, rather than living like a mindless body, a shell of herself.

"Is that so, or do you just not want to fix it?" Jeffrey was blunt, not bothering to pick up on Dorothy's mood.

"Look, in the end, you just don't love Everett enough, do you? You're not willing to drop everything for him; you can't love him as selflessly as he loves you."

"Maybe." Faced with Jeffrey's relentless probing, Dorothy had no defense. After all, she felt the weight of Everett's devotion and her own failure to reciprocate.

Suddenly, Jeffrey slammed on the brakes and pulled over, turning to face her.

"You're just going to admit it?"

Caught off guard, Dorothy nodded faintly. "Yeah."

"Wow, heartless!" Jeffrey bit back his anger.

"Do you have any idea what Everett has done for you? You're alive today because he's been shouldering your burdens! You want revenge for your mother's death, but Everett didn't kill her! How innocent is he? Did you ever think about that?"

Chapter 859

"Jeffrey, my mom was innocent, too."

Jeffrey was rendered speechless.

Dorothy peered at him, her voice edged with resolve. "I owe Everett a lot, but I've got debts to repay to my mom first."

Jeffrey's lips quivered, struggling to find his voice amid the tension.

"So you used Everett, got your mom's lawsuit up and running smoothly, and then, when he's no longer of use, you just kick him back into the abyss, leaving him to fend for himself, right?"

"Interpret it how you want."

Maybe it was the late hour or the stress of hashing out these issues, but Dorothy decided to just let it go.

No explanations, nothing to explain.

"Fucking hell, you really are—really something! Everett deserved better from you!" Jeffrey cursed, his anger boiling over at her attitude.

Dorothy felt too restless to remain in the car any longer, so she abruptly pushed open the rear door and stepped out without a second thought.

She quickened her pace, hoping to find a reprieve, but fate had other plans; no cabs were in sight. Before she had gone far, Jeffrey's car pulled up beside her, blocking her path.

"Dorothy, do you want Karen to have my head when you get back?" he called out, his voice tinged with concern.

"I won't tell her," she replied tersely.

"But if something happens to you, it won't just be Karen after me; Everett will have my hide, too!"

Jeffrey might not have liked Dorothy's defeatist attitude or her flippant tone, but he knew he had to ensure her safety. That much sense he still had, or else he might well be signing his own death warrant.

"I don't need your help," Dorothy insisted, "I can hail a cab myself."

She wanted to avoid further discussion about Everett with Jeffrey, preferring to be alone with her thoughts.

"I just need to keep it together, not break down, until the trial's over."

"Dorothy, I'm not Everett; I don't have endless patience for you! You've hurt my friend, and I can't even call you out on it without you getting upset? Aren't I speaking the truth? Everett is Everett, his mother is his mother—two different people! Hasn't Everett always been impartial with his mom? I just don't get it... Hey! Dorothy, what are you doing?"

Jeffrey was cut off mid-sentence as Dorothy spotted an empty cab, flagged it down, and slipped inside.

By the time he got out of his car to chase after her, she was already gone.

With a frustrated frown, Jeffrey had no choice but to return to his car and follow her, making sure she got to her apartment safely.

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When Jeffrey got back, Karen was still up, waiting for him in the bedroom. Upon seeing him, she let out a sigh of relief.

"What took so long?"

"Had a few words with Dorothy, that's all," Jeffrey didn't tell her about Dorothy getting out of the car.

He didn't want to incite Karen's wrath.

"What did you talk about?" Karen's brow furrowed even at the vague explanation. "You don't know her, Jeffrey. Can't you just avoid small talk with her?"

"It wasn't just small talk... It was about Everett."

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of! Do you think I'm jealous and that's why I don't want you talking to her?" Karen's voice dropped, exasperated. "Dorothy's already stressed out enough, and you're just adding fuel to the fire!"

Jeffrey felt a twinge of annoyance at her words.

"She's stressed? Is Everett having the time of his life, then? Dorothy's the one who's hurt him over and over, and now she's the one who's stressed?"

Karen stood up, hands on hips, and looked up at him defiantly. "Are you playing the knight in shining armor here? Let me ask you this: if my mom killed your mom, would you be able to let it go, say it doesn't matter, and then carry on with me without a grudge?"

Jeffrey was at a loss for words.

Chapter 860

"You and I, we're not like Dorothy. The stress she's under, the worries from all sides, we can't truly grasp it. So no one's got the right to judge her," said Karen.

Jeffrey snorted. "But when it comes down to it, what did Everett do wrong?"

Mulling it over seriously, Karen concluded, "He didn't keep his mom in check."

"That's a bit biased, isn't it? His mom's actions aren't something Everett gets to call the shots on!"

"So what if I'm biased?" Karen retorted with a shrug. "She's my bestie. Am I supposed to take Everett's side? You say he's innocent, but isn't Dorothy? If it hadn't been for Everett chasing after her, dragging her into this whole mess, maybe Dorothy's life would've been a bit tough, but at least her family would've been safe, not poisoned to death! With Dorothy's looks, snagging a rich guy would've been a cakewalk. Take Kenneth, for example – he'd have said 'I do' in a heartbeat!"

Even now, if Dorothy agreed to marry him, Kenneth would lay down his entire fortune at her feet without a second thought, willing and eager.

"My friend's no slouch either! He's the CEO of Lopez Corp; he could have any woman he wanted."

"Exactly! So why's he got this secret torch for Dorothy?"

Jeffrey had no answer.

Karen huffed. "Don't try to argue this with me. I know you're tight with Everett. But in my eyes, as long as Dorothy hasn't betrayed our nation, she can do no wrong!"

...

Returning to her apartment, Dorothy was exhausted from the day's events, but sleep eluded her. Not wanting to waste time on idle thoughts, she washed her face and booted up her laptop to work.

She logged onto the Lopez Corp's software out of habit and glanced at the meeting channel.

Everett was in a meeting.

Although she couldn't see his account online, she knew he was in a meeting because no one but the CEO had access to conference room 1.

The meeting's topic was about the 'Sunset' domestic project. Dorothy remembered Jeffrey mentioning that Everett was selling the Bay Residence. It seemed that the villa in Snowfall City would likely go too, but the 'Sunset' project was already underway and couldn't be shelved.

After logging out of the channel, Dorothy opened her project files and began summarizing.

With her departure from Lopez Corp drawing near, she wanted to ensure she left nothing unfinished to avoid causing problems for her successor.

Head down, she worked straight through the night.

Now she understood why Everett drowned himself in work—it was a good distraction.

At seven in the morning, Dorothy stood up from her computer, shaking off the numbness in her arms and legs before freshening up to head to the office.

But on the way, she felt a sharp pain in her stomach! It started as a mild discomfort but soon intensified.

The burning sensation made Dorothy break out in a cold sweat.

After the taxi pulled up to Lopez Corp, she clenched her teeth, paid the fare, and crouched by the parking lot entrance, hoping to ease the pain enough to go inside.

Suddenly, a pair of black leather shoes came into view, stopping right in front of her.

Dorothy's mind buzzed, her heart skipping a beat as the pain seemed to vanish.

With her body frozen, she slowly looked up...

"Ms. Sanchez, stomachache?"