

Midnight 871

Chapter 871

"Well... You're right. I can't fix that." Jeffrey sprawled on the couch, his lips curling into a wry smile.

"Seriously, the way Dorothy speaks and acts, it's downright hurtful. If I were Everett, I'd have thrown in the towel ages ago—wouldn't have waited until now!"

Karen's eyes turned into slits of disapproval upon hearing him criticize her best friend. "What did you just say?"

"Truth hurts, doesn't it?" Jeffrey felt compelled to speak up for his buddy. "Come on, tell me where Everett has ever done Dorothy wrong? Sure, he was sneaky, not exactly upfront about marrying Dorothy, and yes, he used the fact that Dorothy's mom needed money for medical bills. But once he won her over, he treated her like a freaking treasure! Have you ever seen someone as rich as him grovel for a woman's affection like that?"

Jeffrey was flabbergasted, to say the least. He'd watched Everett morph from a cold and aloof blue-blooded gentleman into Dorothy's devoted little lapdog!

"I—uh," Karen started but couldn't quite pin down any faults in Everett.

Jeffrey crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow at her. "Go on, I'm all ears."

"He wants to marry Dorothy but can't handle his own parents. Isn't that on him?"

"That doesn't mean he's mistreated her, does it? His parents aren't him. Who can control others? Can you dictate your own parents' actions? Besides, Dorothy's been safe all these years. Who do you think the Lopez elders are wary of? Dorothy? They're scared of Everett turning his back on them!"

Jeffrey spread his hands in exasperation. "Anything else?"

"She shouldn't have been dragged into this in the first place," said Karen.

"Now you're just being unreasonable," he countered.

Fuming, Karen grabbed a throw pillow and chucked it at him. "Look at you, Jeffrey! Arguing back at me now, huh? For every word I say, you've got ten ready!"

Jeffrey caught the pillow smoothly, letting out a sigh. "I can give in on other things, but when it comes to Everett, I won't let the blame fall solely on him. He's not just a friend to me; he's a brother, and he saved my life!"

Without Everett pulling him back from the brink time and again, having his back, and solving his problems, Jeffrey had no clue where he'd be today!

Back in the day, Jeffrey's reckless lifestyle had made him no shortage of enemies. With his parents overseas, only scolding and preaching, he never listened! Then, that one time, his loose lips got him tied up and taken to the shore, nearly tossed into the sea. It was Everett who came personally to the rescue, taking him back and smoothing everything over. From then on, Jeffrey knew Everett was the brother he'd choose for life.

Karen cocked her foot. "So tell me, who's more important to you, me or Everett?"

That was a no-win question!

"You're hesitating?" Karen pressed.

Jeffrey raked his hand through his hair, visibly distressed. "Karen, you're not gonna like the answer to that question."

"Everett is more important, right?" Karen sat up straight. "Fine, then you go live with Everett! Let him have your babies!"

As she moved to leave, Jeffrey hurried over, apologizing profusely. "I'm sorry, all right? It's just that Everett... he's like family, even more than my own parents. But I swear you're definitely my number two!"

"Get lost, don't talk to me."

Chapter 872

Dorothy thought that after turning Stephen down, he would take the hint and back off. But the very next day, he didn't even bother to text her on WhatsApp before showing up unannounced at her office door.

"Ms. Sanchez, do you have a moment?" His voice preceded his presence.

Looking up from the price list she was scrutinizing, Dorothy caught sight of him standing just outside her door.

Stephen had clearly made an effort today, dressed to the nines in a sharp suit, and it seemed he'd even spritzed on some cologne—a scent that wafted her way as she approached.

But no matter how dapper he appeared, Everett firmly held the title of 'best-dressed'. At least in Dorothy's heart, that was an unshakeable truth.

"What?" Dorothy asked, clearly not intending to invite him in, opting to converse right at the doorway.

Clutching a few sheets of paper in his hand, Stephen revealed his concerns about the project, all neatly written out.

"Yeah, could you take a look at this and maybe clear up some things for me? Austin's tied up today and isn't in the office, so I had no choice but to come to you," Stephen said, flashing what he believed to be his most charming smile.

Any other woman might have swooned by now; after all, his looks were above average.

But Dorothy? She barely glanced at him, her focus fixed on the content of the papers.

Truth be told, Stephen was nitpicking. A little thought and he would have grasped the issues at hand, especially since Dorothy had already annotated the documents thoroughly to ease the transition for the new director.

"Mr. Stephen, haven't you managed a project before?" she asked, looking up at him.

Stephen mistook her inquiry as a sign of interest and promptly responded, "I've led a few projects at the Lopez Corporation. In fact, I was the one who steered my previous team to success."

“Mr. Stephen, I really shouldn't be questioning your capabilities. After all, if the higher-ups at the Lopez Corporation entrusted you with this project, you must have some exceptional qualities. But... seeing the questions you've brought to me, I can't help but wonder if you're either lacking in professional knowledge or if this is some kind of ploy?”

“I—I'm just getting to grips with the project; that's why I'm a bit unfamiliar.”

“Too unfamiliar to understand a product pricing sheet?” Dorothy pointed at a line on the document. “That shouldn't be the case, Mr. Stephen.”

Stephen hadn't expected her to be so forthright and felt a twinge of embarrassment. He knew his question was a stretch, but wasn't it all just an attempt to get closer to her?

“Maybe I was careless, didn't look closely enough. I'll go over it again,” he conceded.

“I've annotated everything that could be annotated. If you still don't understand, Mr. Stephen, I suggest you ask Austin. If he can't explain it, tell him to come to me.”

Dorothy didn't have time for Stephen's subtle advances. Her rejection was clear as day.

Stephen was starting to see why Austin had warned him that she was a tough nut to crack...

The icy beauty was utterly unapproachable!

“Ms. Sanchez, our conversations seem a bit off. Is there a misunderstanding between us?”

“Whether there is a misunderstanding or not is irrelevant,” Dorothy said. After all, she was on her way out.

“I think it's quite important,” Stephen said, deciding to lay his cards on the table. “From the first time I saw you, my heart raced. So... I wanted to pursue you. That's why I made up those questions—to have a chance to talk to you alone.”

Dorothy glanced at him and smirked. “Didn't Austin tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

“I'm married.”

Chapter 873

Dorothy thought Everett's way of turning down women was pure gold, and she filed it away for future use.

"What?" Stephen was taken aback. "But Austin said you..."

"Mr. Stephen, are you under the impression that I might be single?"

Stephen was speechless.

Without wasting another breath on him, Dorothy spun on her heel and returned to her desk, dismissing him entirely.

A few seconds later, Stephen sulkily walked away.

She wrapped up her workload, and it was nearly time to clock out. Just as she was about to leave, her phone buzzed with a call from Kenneth.

"Dorothy, you off work yet?"

"Almost! What's up?"

"My girlfriend wants to meet you and Karen. And with Karen being heavily pregnant, it's not easy for her, so I was thinking... How about you join us for dinner?"

Kenneth's tone was casual, as if completely wrapped up in the throes of love.

"Another time, perhaps. I've got to swing by West Legal Services."

"Oh, is it about the lawsuit?"

"Kind of."

There was a pause on the line. "Alright then! If you need anything, just give me a ring."

"Sure will."

Hanging up, Dorothy grabbed her purse and left the Lopez Building, hailing a cab straight to West Legal Services.

Upon entering, she spotted Ephraim chatting with some clients.

Seeing Dorothy, he quickly wrapped up the conversation and headed her way.

"Ms. Sanchez, were you looking for me?"

"Yes," Dorothy nodded. "I was wondering... who will be attending the trial on the other side? Will Everett be there?"

Could she actually see him? After all, this might be her last chance.

"I'm not sure yet. If you want, I can find out who has requested to attend from their side."

"If you inquire, wouldn't the defendant get wind of it?"

She didn't want Everett to know she was keeping tabs on him, but she couldn't just explain that to Ephraim! She wasn't sure if Ephraim was in Everett's pocket; after all, he was the lawyer Everett had found for her.

"Ms. Sanchez, if you tell me why you're asking, I might be able to figure out a better way to handle it."

Dorothy remained silent.

"Like... is there someone you don't want to see in court?"

Dorothy hesitated, then chuckled. "Just curious, that's all."

"Then there's no need to ask. I can't guarantee that the other party won't find out."

"Okay, then don't bother. Thanks anyway, Ephraim! I'm heading out."

After a slight bow to Ephraim, Dorothy left the law firm.

Ephraim watched her sudden arrival and swift departure, baffled.

After a moment's hesitation, he picked up his phone, scrolled through his contacts, and dialed a number.

"Hello? Mr. Lopez!"

"Yeah." The voice on the other end was cool. "What is it?"

"Well, Ms. Sanchez just stopped by! She seemed to want to know who will be attending the hearing."

Ephraim waited a few seconds for a response, then continued, "I asked her if there was someone she didn't want to meet in court."

"And what did she say?"

"Ms. Sanchez hesitated."

After a long pause, Everett finally spoke in a low voice, "The next time she asks, tell her I won't be attending. She doesn't need to worry about seeing me in court."

"Understood, Mr. Lopez."

Chapter 874

The day Dorothy left the Lopez Corporation, she rose with the sun. She wanted no fuss, no fanfare. Catching a cab, she headed straight to the office. Bypassing her usual workspace, she made a beeline for the HR department to formalize her departure.

"Ms. Sanchez, just fill out this form, and you'll be all set," said the HR assistant, sliding a piece of paper across the desk.

Dorothy glanced at it - a standard exit survey for employees choosing to leave the company.

"Alright," she said, taking the pen and methodically filling in each section.

The assistant watched her curiously. "If you don't mind me asking, Ms. Sanchez, why are you leaving the Lopez Corporation?"

Dorothy hesitated, searching for a diplomatic answer. "It just doesn't feel like the right fit for me."

She couldn't very well say that she was about to sue the company's CEO's family and it was no longer appropriate to stay.

"You know, in all my time here, you're one of the few who've chosen to leave voluntarily."

Dorothy's pen paused as she offered an awkward smile. "Yes, it's quite rare to leave the Lopez Corporation."

The perks here were second to none - great benefits, a dynamic work environment, and plenty of opportunities for advancement.

Landing a job here was no small feat. Who would willingly walk away?

If it weren't for her connections with Everett, Dorothy might have needed years, maybe even a decade, to gain enough experience to be considered for a position here.

She finished the survey and reached the final section: suggestions for the company.

Dorothy pondered for a moment, then wrote slowly: [May Everett always find peace and joy.]

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Leaving the building, Dorothy's heart was a mix of heavy and light.

Her phone rang; it was Karen.

"Dorothy, I have a prenatal appointment today. Will you come with me?"

"Me? What about Jeffrey?"

"I don't want him to come. We're not on the best terms right now!" Karen didn't mention to Dorothy that their argument was mainly about Everett. She reminded herself never to bring up anything about Everett around Dorothy again.

Dorothy paused, not pressing for details. "Okay, I'll come and get you."

"Now? Aren't you working today?"

Dorothy sighed. "As of today, I'm officially no longer with the Lopez Corporation."

Karen was taken aback. "So, your lawsuit is going to court soon?"

"Yeah."

"That's great, you've finally reached this day."

Dorothy's smile was forced, and she quickly changed the subject. After hanging up, she hailed a cab to Jeffrey's place.

Expecting to find Karen and Jeffrey in the midst of a cold war, Dorothy was surprised to find Jeffrey at home, trying to make amends.

"Please, let me come with you! I want to hear our baby's heartbeat!"

"No need, Dorothy's coming with me!"

"It's not like one more person will hurt! I'll just stand there and be quiet, okay?" Jeffrey pleaded, his pride scattered like dust at their feet.

As soon as Karen saw Dorothy, she rushed over. "Dorothy, let's just go."

Dorothy felt awkward. "Um... maybe Jeffrey should go with you? I just remembered I have something else to do."

"Exactly, I'll go with you! Don't bother her, Karen. I'm sorry, okay? From now on, you're my number one, Evere..."

Jeffrey's words were cut off as Karen clamped a hand over his mouth.

"Don't you dare mention that name in front of Dorothy!"

Chapter 875

If Karen hadn't thrown such a curveball, Dorothy might have been none the wiser. She dashed over and clamped a hand over Jeffrey's mouth, which only ended up making Dorothy feel awkward. As if she had been gossiping about Everett behind Karen's back...

"Today, it's just going to be a girls' day out for Dorothy and me. You can stay home!" Karen said as she looped her arm through Dorothy's.

Jeffrey's handsome face turned into a picture of sorrow, "Honey... Karen..."

"Get lost!" Karen snapped, grabbing the car keys from the hall table and handing them to Dorothy. "You drive, Dorothy!"

"Are you sure we shouldn't bring him along? What if we need some muscle for something, like climbing up and down the hospital stairs."

Dorothy, who had been through childbirth, knew all too well what a prenatal checkup entailed.

"No need! Jeffrey arranged for VIP service. We won't need your help; your company is all I need."

Dorothy shot Jeffrey a sympathetic look.

She cautiously ventured only after they got in the car, "Did you guys have a fight over something?"

"Nah, it's trivial!"

"Is it... about me?"

"No way! It has nothing to do with you!" Karen was resolute, refusing to bring up Everett's name and add to Dorothy's concerns.

Seeing Karen's certainty, Dorothy felt a bit relieved.

Approaching the hospital, Dorothy could see Jeffrey's car stealthily trailing them in the rear-view mirror.

Karen didn't need to guess; she knew that man would follow.

"Jeez, Jeffrey's like bubblegum stuck to our shoe—impossible to shake off."

Dorothy sighed resignedly, "He's worried about you! How about I head off and you let him keep you company?"

"No way, I want my best gal by my side!" Karen chuckled. "Hey, when your court date comes up, can I come with you? I want to be there in the gallery!"

"You're pregnant, honey. That's no place for you."

Courtrooms weren't exactly cheerful places, and going through a security scan would bring radiation, which wasn't ideal for someone expecting.

"But I want to be there for you! I've watched you pour your heart and soul into this case. Now that it's crunch time, I want to stand by you."

"Karen, just bringing that baby into the world safe and sound is my biggest wish. Forget the rest," Dorothy said, gripping the steering wheel and forcing a smile. "As for the trial, I'm ready for whatever comes. Don't worry about me." She claimed.

On hearing this, Karen frowned slightly. "If... I mean if it doesn't go our way, would you give up, or would you appeal again?"

"I've thought it through. Whatever the verdict of the first trial, I won't appeal. Karen, I'm out of steam."

If the verdict went against them, she'd enact her plan. Should Everett's mother be acquitted or sentenced to a mere slap on the wrist, the Lopez family surely wouldn't appeal, as that would be the outcome they desired.

For Dorothy, if she still lost despite the overwhelming evidence, any appeal would only prolong the agony. She didn't want to suffer any longer.

It was all too exhausting. She yearned to wrap it all up.

"So you'd just accept it?" Karen was taken aback. "You used to say..."

"Karen, I want this trial over so I can finally rest."

And rest forever.

Karen didn't catch the gravity in her words and nodded earnestly, "You're right, after all these years of battling, you deserve a break! As long as you're at peace with it, I'll support whatever you decide!"

Chapter 876

Karen's words usually made Dorothy chuckle in response. But this time, she looked at Karen with earnest eyes.

"You'll support me no matter what I do?" she asked.

"Absolutely!"

"Good." Dorothy flashed a smile. Having someone in her corner was all she needed.

In the end, Dorothy still had Jeffrey accompany Karen for the check-up.

The two bickered playfully as they went, but as a father, Jeffrey didn't want to miss a single moment of his little one's growth. That was a feeling Dorothy understood all too well.

After all, if you let such a regret fester, it could last a lifetime.

Dorothy stepped out of the hospital alone and looked up at the sky instinctively.

The weather was splendid today with an endless expanse of azure, dotted leisurely with a few carefree clouds.

A sudden impulse struck her.

She wanted to escape the muddle of life, to forget who she was, and before the final verdict was in, to gallop across the prairies, to race freely in vast open spaces.

Her phone was already in hand, the ticketing app open, and yet Dorothy ultimately backed out.

True freedom wasn't something she could claim in this lifetime. She couldn't really forget who she was as well as the responsibilities weighing on her shoulders.

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Before she knew it, only three days remained until the court hearing.

Dorothy could scarcely sleep more than three hours straight, exhaustion be damned. When she did manage to close her eyes, a mere two hours passed before nightmares jolted her awake.

The more restless her nights, the more drained she felt by day, her weight plummeting nearly ten pounds.

Thank goodness for Karen. Noticing her best friend out of sorts, she insisted on a pretext of meeting Kenneth's girlfriend to coax Dorothy out of her apartment.

Karen chided Dorothy for neglecting her meals all the way there.

"Are you trying to starve yourself to death? Lose any more weight and you'll become a walking skeleton!"

"It's not that dramatic." Dorothy chuckled, having donned a swipe of lipstick for Kenneth's girlfriend's sake, adding a touch of color to her otherwise pallid complexion, "I've been eating, just not much appetite."

"Why don't you move in with me?" Karen asked.

Dorothy shook her head quickly, "I don't want to intrude on your love nest."

Karen pouted, "You mean more to me than Jeffrey!"

Jeffrey, who was driving, instantly glanced at her through the rear-view mirror.

"Hey. Why you must be my top priority and I'm not yours?" He had, after all, reluctantly demoted his best bud to second place.

"No reason. You should be grateful I haven't completely written you off!"

Jeffrey quickly shrank back and fell silent.

As they approached the agreed-upon diner, Dorothy spotted Kenneth's car parked on the curb. He seemed to arrive early

"I still can't believe Kenneth has moved on!" Karen whispered to Dorothy.

"Be nice," Dorothy urged.

"Of course!"

The trio entered the diner to find Kenneth waiting by the door with a gentle-looking girl at his side. She had a clean look and there was a warm aura about her.

Karen was about to wave when she saw Kenneth leaving his girlfriend's side and striding towards them, his gaze fixed on Dorothy, his brow furrowed slightly.

"Dorothy, what happened? You've gotten so thin."

Chapter 877

He blurted it out without thinking, his concern as instinctive as breathing. It was as though it was etched deep in his bones, he was completely oblivious to how his eagerness might be putting his girlfriend next to him in an awkward spot.

Dorothy was the first to recover, clearing her throat with a subtle cough and offering a light chuckle, "Been caught up in a bit of a whirlwind lately. Thanks for your and your girlfriend's concern."

It was only then that Kenneth remembered he had brought his girlfriend along. An awkward grin tugged at his lips as he took a step back and pulled his girlfriend into the introduction, "This is Eleanor, my girlfriend. This is my cousin Karen, and that's her husband, Jeffrey. And this is..."

He paused for a moment before finding the right words, "Karen's bestie, Dorothy."

"Nice to meet you all!" Eleanor seemed unfazed by the earlier awkwardness, her greeting warm and friendly, "Karen, Kenneth always talks about those childhood capers of yours."

Karen squinted her eyes in a playful smile, "Well, you might want to take his stories with a grain of salt. Kenneth surely hasn't painted a very ladylike picture of me."

Kenneth rolled his eyes in resignation, "Mainly because you're rarely ever ladylike."

"Hmph!"

The group moved into the private room, laughter and banter flowing easily. The table was already set with a feast of pre-ordered dishes.

Dorothy chose a seat near the door, planning her exit strategy for when the conversation lulled—she felt out of place and was so exhausted that she wanted to go home and rest. After a restless night filled with intermittent awakenings and vivid dreams that still clung to her memory, she slumped into her chair, her mind drifting in and out of the ongoing chatter.

"Dorothy?"

Kenneth's voice snapped her back to the present.

"Oh, what's up?"

"Dig in, will ya? All your favorites are here. You should eat more and stop wasting away." His words were laden with genuine concern.

She felt like a deer in headlights, "Yeah, sure! I'm just gonna hit the restroom real quick. You guys carry on."

With that, she bolted from the room—not so much fleeing as needing a moment to breathe, splash some water on her face to elevate her spirit—or she'd just sit there and fall into sleep.

After getting directions from a server, Dorothy found the restroom was a bit of a walk away, which suited her just fine—it meant she could delay her return.

She splashed cold water on her face and rummaged through her purse for a disposable towel to dry off. Before she could find it, a towel was handed to her.

"Here, use mine."

"Thanks!" She mumbled, not quite making out the face without her glasses. She patted her face dry, then put her glasses back on to see Eleanor, Kenneth's girlfriend, holding out the towel.

"You look a bit off-color. Are you feeling alright?" Eleanor's voice was laced with concern.

"Just a rough night's sleep, that's all."

Eleanor nodded with a smile, "I was worried you were avoiding me."

"Why would I?" Dorothy couldn't be happier to see Kenneth with someone else.

Eleanor didn't linger by the sink. After washing her hands, she turned to face Dorothy, "I know about you and Kenneth and the fact that he's waited for you for years."

Dorothy didn't reply.

"I don't mind." Eleanor said.

Dorothy's expression was the very picture of embarrassment.

"I don't even mind that in bed, he insists on calling me Dorothy. I know he's not calling out for me."

Dorothy was at a loss for words.

"He doesn't really like me, but that's okay. I don't really like him either."

Chapter 878

Eleanor's smile was incongruous with her otherwise demure appearance. It held an air of nonchalance that seemed out of place on her gentle features.

"I mean, the guy I had a thing for got hitched years ago. So, I totally understand his feeling. I see you're flying solo too, Dorothy. Ever thought about...?"

Dorothy cut in swiftly, eager to set the record straight, "Kenneth is just a friend to me, nothing more. I'm already into someone else and that's not going to change."

Eleanor arched an eyebrow, "Must be quite the catch to snag your attention."

"He is exceptional."

Exceptional to the point where she felt unworthy.

"Well, here's to hoping things work out with your Mr. Right!"

"Thanks," Dorothy said with a small smile. "And you and Kenneth—are wedding bells in your future?"

Eleanor paused, mulling it over seriously. "I guess so. I mean, I'm not about to be the other woman and steal someone else's man. If Kenneth pops the question, I'd say yes." She said.

Dorothy wanted to warn her that marriages of convenience might not last, that she might regret it, but she held back. After all, marriage itself was a kind of fate, wasn't it? She had been in love with Everett, and yet, they were divorced. Who could predict the future?

For adults, all that mattered was to take responsibility for their own choices.

"I just hope I'll get an invite to your wedding." Dorothy concluded.

Eleanor missed the deeper meaning behind Dorothy's words, assuming she was just offering reassurance.

"No need to be so cautious with your words. Like I said, it's all good."

Dorothy just smiled, offering no explanation.

The two women returned to the private dining room, where the tension was palpable. Their friends seemed on edge, as if bracing for a confrontation between them that never came. But there was harmony between Dorothy and Eleanor, and after their chat, Dorothy even no longer felt like she was on pins and needles.

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After dinner, Karen and Jeffrey dropped Dorothy back at her apartment before heading to their own place. On the way, Jeffrey received a call from Everett.

"The spring tech conference is coming up. Can you make it? You'd have to be out of Eldorria City for three days." Everett was aware of Karen's situation and wanted to give Jeffrey the choice.

Jeffrey glanced at Karen and, sensing her approval, agreed, "Yeah, I can make it."

"Good, I'll have Kevin sort out your flight," Everett said, ready to hang up, but Jeffrey interrupted.

"Everett, do you know what we just did?"

"No clue," his reply was always extremely simple.

Jeffrey sighed dramatically, "Karen's cousin Kenneth has got himself a girlfriend! We just had dinner with them. She's a looker, and they seem well-matched."

Everett on the other end clearly wasn't interested in the gossip, "And your point?"

"Dorothy's the one I feel sorry for. She used to have you and Kenneth, both treating her like she was the center of the universe. Now you two have split, and Kenneth's taken. Poor Dorothy's left on her own."

Karen, sitting in the passenger seat, bristled at the comment, "Hold on there. Dorothy would have Kenneth back in a heartbeat if she just gave the word. He'd drop that new girl like a hot potato."

Jeffrey quickly signaled her to play along. He was trying to get a rise out of Everett, to see if there was a chance for reconciliation, but Karen wasn't catching on.

Before Jeffrey could say another word, Everett's deep voice cut through the conversation.

"I don't need updates on her life."

Chapter 879

The line went dead before Jeffrey could get another word out.

Karen rolled her eyes, "Stop mentioning Dorothy to Everett, will you? The way you talk is like she's some damsel in distress without a suitor in sight. There's a whole line of guys just waiting for a chance with her!"

Men would be practically queuing up at her door with her face.

"I'm just thinking of giving Everett a nudge to reconsider, that's all. Don't you want Abigail and Langston to grow up in a home with both parents around?"

"Of course, I do! But not by making Dorothy look pitiful! Besides, Everett's sold the Bay Residence; his intentions are clear as day. Give it a rest. Considering all the drama between those two, I reckon they're better off apart. They'll hurt for a while, sure, but they'll get over it."

Jeffrey bit his lips.

"And didn't you use to disapprove of Dorothy? What's with the matchmaking all of a sudden?" Karen pressed.

Jeffrey looked as if he was about to cry, "I just said she could be a bit harsh on Everett! It's always been Dorothy dumping him during these years. That's true, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but if you find it cruel, then don't meddle! Have you ever thought that maybe Everett's willing to put up with it? It's not your place to feel sorry for him!" Karen bit back.

"You have a point."

"As for Dorothy and Everett's situation, I've already spoken to Dorothy. She seems to have her own plan, so let's just stay out of it."

At that, Jeffrey raised an eyebrow, "What sort of plan? I'm really curious."

"Like I'd tell you. If you know, it means Everett knows!" Karen shrugged. "Besides, I don't know the details. I didn't pry."

She felt Dorothy had enough on her plate without her digging for more.

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Dorothy visited the cemetery the day before the court session.

This time she didn't speak a word, just stood silently and gazed at the photo of Bella on the tombstone from dawn until the late afternoon. It wasn't until the sun was about to set that Dorothy finally moved her numb legs.

"Dorothy? I knew I'd find you here!"

Hearing the voice, Dorothy slowly lifted her head to meet Kenneth's worried gaze. "Karen called and said she couldn't find you anywhere. I guessed you'd be here." He explained.

Her voice was hoarse as she spoke, "I put my phone on silent."

She felt the ringtone would disturb the sleeping souls in the cemetery.

"How long have you been standing here? Come on, let's get you home," Kenneth made sure that she must have arrived early from her look.

"Kenneth, don't worry about me. Just go on home." Kenneth had a girlfriend now, and whether she minded or not, Dorothy knew it was best to keep her distance.

"How can I leave you like this?" he replied, then hesitated before adding, "Eleanor doesn't know I'm here. She's working overtime today."

Dorothy gave a weak smile, looking up at him, "If she doesn't know, that's all the more reason I shouldn't be alone with you."

"I've always seen you as a sister!"

"That's easy for you to say, but it's everyone else who has to believe it," Dorothy said with a sigh, her voice gravelly. "Kenneth, if you've found someone right for you, hold on to her and don't live with regrets. I'm an adult; I know what I'm saying, what I'm doing, where I'm going. Even without you, I won't get lost, and I certainly won't die."

Chapter 880

Everyone knew those truths.

But Kenneth couldn't bear the thought that he might fade from her world.

After a prolonged silence, his voice was tender, "I'm sorry, Dorothy. I've been a burden for too long, right."

"You don't have to put yourself down like that," she replied. "I just hope that someone as good-hearted as you will get the happy ending you deserve."

"Yeah, I will. I'm going to spend some more time with Eleanor and then I'm going to propose," Kenneth said, his gaze fixed on her, never allowing his tumult of emotions to spill into harsh words. He always honored all her wishes. "Would you come to the wedding?" he asked.

"I might. If I'm around, I'll be there."

He nodded, "Okay."

After he left the cemetery, Dorothy lingered a while longer, speaking softly to her mother's gravestone, "I'll come back on the day of the verdict."

Descending the hill, Dorothy didn't hail a taxi back to her apartment. Instead, she headed straight to the supermarket. She needed a drink.

The court session wasn't until the next afternoon, so even if she got wasted tonight, it wouldn't mess with anything.

Without a drink, she'd face another sleepless night. It would be unbearable watching the clock tick towards dawn.

But after aimlessly wandering the supermarket aisles, Dorothy left empty-handed. She then grabbed a cab and made a beeline for the local bar.

If she was going to drown her sorrows, she might as well do it surrounded by others looking to do the same. It made her feel less conspicuous.

As soon as she walked in, Dorothy caught the eye of a lot of men. She didn't look like your typical club-goer, but that didn't matter. Her innocent yet alluring face and slender figure exuded a challenging aura.

Men are drawn to challenges, after all.

"Miss, may I have the pleasure of buying you a drink?"

The first suitor approached swiftly, not-so-subtly flashing his exclusive credit card.

Dorothy merely glanced at it, not chasing him away but not engaging either. She just downed her drink and took out her phone, dialing a number.

“The number you have dialed is not in service...”

As the man realized she wasn't interested, he left with his ego slightly bruised.

The second and third attempts by other men yielded the same results.

Dorothy kept her head down, stubbornly dialing the same number over and over. If it didn't go through, she'd take another drink and try again.

Finally, when she didn't know which attempt it was, a young man, probably a college student, approached, “Flying solo tonight, miss?”

It was then she finally looked up, her voice tinged with inebriation, “Got a cell phone?”

“Of course!”

“Lend it to me.” She said, pushing a hundred-dollar bill towards him. “For the call. It's yours.”

The young man had never encountered such a situation before. He smiled and found it amusing.

“I wouldn't dream of taking your money just for lending out my phone. But... after I lend you my phone, could you give me your number?”

“No.” Her reply was blunt.

Surprisingly, he grinned at her candor, “I like your straightforward rejection. Here, use my phone all you want.”

Dorothy took it, dialing the familiar sequence of numbers.

This time, the call connected immediately – that confirmed her number had been blocked.

A deep male voice answered promptly, “Hello, who is this?”

“Everett... I'm drunk again. Why haven't you shown up yet...”