

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life chapter 286

Chapter 286

Norah clung tightly to Kevin's jacket, her knuckles pale with tension. She couldn't bear to look back, terrified of what she might see, fearing the worst.

Kevin's deep, steady voice broke through her spiraling thoughts. "Be good. Don't be scared. You're safe now," he said, his tone calm despite the chaos around them.

Those few words grounded her, giving her the strength to hold on. "It's okay. It's going to be okay," she murmured, more to convince herself than anyone else.

Behind them, one of Kevin's comrades in camouflage called out urgently. "Captain Edwards!" His voice was tight with concern.

The firefight earlier had kept the others pinned down, unable to cross to where Kevin was. Now, they watched helplessly, unsure if their captain had made it through unscathed.

Kevin handed Norah to the men as soon as they reached him. "Get her out of here," he ordered firmly.

The team wasted no time. They bundled Norah into the safety of a vehicle and sped off, the tires kicking up a cloud of dust.

Inside the car, Norah's heart raced uncontrollably. She gripped Kevin's sleeve as if it were a lifeline. "Are you okay? Tell me you're okay," she asked, her voice trembling.

Kevin, sitting upright despite the ordeal, placed his hand gently over hers. "I'm fine," he assured her, his voice steady.

But Norah wasn't convinced. She studied his face, noting its alarming paleness. Something was wrong.

Her worst fears were confirmed when she felt something warm and sticky on her hand. The metallic tang of blood filled the air. Her hand trembled as she lifted it, now stained crimson.

“Kevin...” she whispered, her voice breaking.

He had been shot.

Panic surged through her as she frantically searched for the source of the bleeding. Her eyes landed on the wound—a gunshot to his left chest. Blood was pouring out fast.

“You’re not okay!” she cried, pressing her hands against the wound in a desperate attempt to stop the bleeding. “You’ve been shot, Kevin! Do you hear me?”

Kevin grimaced but still tried to downplay his injury. “I’m fine,” he said through gritted teeth. “As long as you’re safe, that’s all that matters. Just get me to the hospital.”

Norah turned to the driver, her voice frantic. “Hurry! Get to the hospital!”

The car sped down the road, the engine roaring.

Kevin leaned back, his body slick with cold sweat, but he still reached for Norah’s trembling hand. “Calm down,” he urged, his voice soft but firm. “You need to take care of yourself too.”

Her tear-streaked face turned toward him, her eyes wide with anguish. “Why, Kevin? Why would you risk your life like this? They were after me, not you! You didn’t have to come!”

Kevin’s lips curved into a faint smile despite the pain. “How could I not? I couldn’t just stand by and let you fall.”

Tears streamed down Norah’s face as her voice cracked with emotion. “And now I owe you again. How am I supposed to repay this?”

“You don’t,” Kevin replied simply.

“But I have to!” she choked out. “If anything happens to you, I’ll never forgive myself.”

Kevin’s voice was barely audible, his strength fading. “I won’t die, Norah. I can’t. Who else will protect you if I’m gone?”

His words only made her cry harder. “You’re such an idiot,” she sobbed.

Kevin mustered a weak laugh. “Maybe. But you’re worth it.”

Norah clutched his hand tightly as the hospital came into view. Military vehicles rolled in, and medical staff rushed out, pushing a gurney toward them.

Kevin was carefully lifted onto the gurney, his breathing shallow. Oxygen was strapped to his face, and the nurses worked quickly to stabilize him.

Norah followed closely, refusing to let go of his hand until they reached the operating room.

“Ma’am, you need to wait outside,” a nurse said, stopping her gently but firmly.

The doors swung shut with a resounding thud, leaving Norah frozen in place.

She stared at the red light above the operating room door, her heart in her throat. Every passing second felt like an eternity.

“Norah! Norah!”

The familiar voice of Gloria snapped her out of her daze. She turned to see her friend rushing toward her, worry etched across her face.

“Are you okay?” Gloria asked, grabbing her shoulders.

Norah’s gaze remained fixed on the operating room door. “If I hadn’t insisted on going to the hospital for a check-up, none of this would’ve happened,” she said quietly, her voice thick with guilt.

Gloria’s expression hardened. “Don’t say that, Norah. This isn’t your fault. You can’t predict or prevent every danger. The people who did this are the ones to blame, not you.”

Norah finally looked at Gloria, her eyes hollow. “If I could protect myself, Kevin wouldn’t have to risk his life for me.”

Gloria’s grip tightened. “Kevin would protect you no matter what. He cares about you, Norah, more than anything. And that’s why you need to stay strong—for him.”

Norah’s lips trembled, and she nodded slowly, her gaze returning to the glowing light above the operating room.

“Kevin,” she whispered, her voice barely audible. “You promised me. You have to make it through.”

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Gloria furrowed her brows and spoke firmly, her tone sharp yet steady. “Are you letting fear cloud your judgment? What do you mean, ‘too weak’? You’re not a soldier. You’re not trained in combat. You’re a pregnant woman, Norah. Stop blaming yourself for something that’s entirely out of your control! The real criminals are still out there, and blaming yourself won’t solve a damn thing.”

Norah’s guilt gnawed at her. She hated feeling helpless, hated that her weakness had put others at risk. She couldn’t help but replay everything in her mind—the danger, the kidnappers, their relentless thirst for her life.

Gloria softened her voice but kept her resolve. “Listen, Norah, no matter how much you beat yourself up, you can’t change the fact that someone tried to hurt you. You can’t prevent every threat, no matter how strong you think you should be. These people need to be stopped, and they *will* be. But you can’t carry this weight on your shoulders alone. Kevin would never let that happen.”

Norah, trembling, leaned into Gloria’s embrace. Her voice wavered. “I’m scared, Gloria. This wasn’t just some random kidnapping. It felt... calculated. I don’t think I can fight them. I’m not strong enough.”

The darkness of the trunk flashed in her mind—the suffocating fear, the weight of impending doom.

Gloria gently stroked her back, her voice a soothing balm. “You don’t have to do this alone. I’ll be with you every step of the way. We’ll face this together. You’re not as alone as you think.”

Norah closed her eyes, taking a shaky breath. Gloria’s words felt like a lifeline, grounding her in the chaos of her emotions.

But something deeper nagged at Norah—Karina. Her gut told her there was more to that woman. The way Karina reacted, the strange familiarity Norah had felt... it wasn’t random. Something buried in the depths of her mind was trying to resurface, and the pieces just didn’t fit.

She shook her head, trying to push the thoughts away, but they lingered like shadows she couldn’t escape.

Hours passed, each dragging slower than the last. The sterile hospital halls seemed frozen in time, eerily silent as midnight crept in.

The surgery had stretched to eight long hours, and with every passing minute, Norah’s anxiety grew. She hadn’t slept. She hadn’t eaten. She couldn’t. She was too afraid of what she might wake up to if she dared close her eyes.

Finally, the light above the operating room flickered off, and the double doors swung open. Norah bolted to her feet, her heart hammering in her chest. Kevin was wheeled out, pale and lifeless, his body swaddled in medical equipment.

The doctor approached, exhaustion etched into his face.

"The surgery was successful," he said, his tone cautious, "but he's not out of the woods yet. The next 24 hours are critical. Whether he regains consciousness... we'll know by tomorrow."

Norah's breath hitched, and her heart sank. She nodded numbly, her gaze locked on Kevin's unconscious form as they wheeled him into the ICU. She pressed her palm against the cold glass window, staring at his pale face.

Gloria stood beside her, placing a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Kevin's strong. He'll pull through. I know he will. You just have to believe."

Norah forced a nod, but her voice betrayed her fear. "You're tired, Gloria. Go home and rest. I'll be fine."

Gloria shook her head resolutely. "I'm not leaving. You're not alone in this, Norah. I'll stay right here until Kevin wakes up. We'll wait together."

Meanwhile, in a dark, abandoned warehouse, the sound of a whip cutting through the air echoed sharply.

Smack!

The whip struck Karina's back with merciless force, splitting the skin. Blood oozed from the fresh wounds, but Karina didn't cry out. She clenched her teeth, her body trembling as she collapsed to the ground, barely able to move.

Archer, seated in a chair, sipped tea nonchalantly as if he were watching an entertaining show. His cold, unfeeling eyes finally turned to Karina, who lay motionless on the floor.

"You hesitated," he said icily, setting his cup down. "You had the chance to finish her, but you didn't. Are you working against me, Karina? Do you have your own agenda?"

Karina crawled weakly toward him, her voice hoarse and trembling. "No... no, I would never... She grabbed my hand. I couldn't let go in time. Please, believe me. It won't happen again. I'll fix it. I'll prove myself."

Archer's expression hardened. He kicked her aside like she was nothing more than garbage. Karina gasped as pain radiated through her ribs, but she didn't dare cry out. Instead, she begged for mercy.

“You’ve already failed me,” Archer said, his voice dripping with disdain. “You’re worthless. If I hadn’t picked you up from the gutter, you’d be rotting in some filthy alley.”

Karina’s chest tightened. She nodded submissively, tears pooling in her eyes. “I know. You saved me. You’re my… adoptive father.”

The words tasted bitter in her mouth. Archer wasn’t a father—he was a tyrant. A puppet master. And she was just one of his disposable pawns.

They were all raised under Archer’s control.

But the only feelings they held for him were fear and a deep sense of awe—no affection whatsoever.

To Archer, they were nothing more than tools to generate money.

They knew this well.

If anyone became dispensable, they would inevitably be sacrificed.

Yet, they couldn’t resist.

From the moment their hands were stained with blood, they became worse than outcasts—forced to scurry in the shadows just to survive.

The thought of living freely in the light was a distant dream, one they had long forfeited.

Archer narrowed his eyes, his voice icy and demanding: “What about Jace?”

Suspicion lingered in Archer’s mind. He hadn’t seen Jace for a long time, and he couldn’t help but question their loyalty.

Before his words could settle, the sound of measured footsteps echoed in the silent space. The pace was deliberate, each step clear and purposeful.

Archer immediately recognized who it was. Without hesitation, he flung Karina to the ground.

Karina’s body convulsed with pain, teetering on the edge of unconsciousness. Still, she forced her eyes to remain open, knowing Jace had arrived.

Jace stood in the doorway, his white coat stark against the dim surroundings. Hands casually tucked in his pockets, he radiated calm confidence, despite the danger thick in the air.

Archer didn’t wait. He lashed the whip at Jace.

Jace made no attempt to evade the blow.

The whip tore across Jace's face, leaving a crimson streak on his refined, almost otherworldly features.

His brown eyes betrayed no emotion.

It was as if he had no capacity for feelings—no pain, no reaction, and certainly no joy. Perhaps he had even forgotten what joy felt like.

“Do you still know how to come back?” Archer snarled. “What have you been doing these past days? Karina's been breaking her back for you, while you've been off enjoying yourself!”

Jace walked forward with measured steps, stopping just before Archer. A faint, enigmatic smile played on his lips as he said, “This is where I left. Naturally, it's where I'll return.”

Archer leaned back in his chair, his glare unrelenting. “You didn't complete the mission!”

Jace's tone was indifferent, almost detached. “My mission was to dissect the human body.”

Archer's dissatisfaction grew. His hands clenched tightly as his eyes bore into Jace. “But your mind seems restless. Tell me—you're not planning to betray me, are you?”

Karina's heart sank, fear flooding her. Despite the pain, she began crawling toward them.

Jace's cold, slender fingers brushed against Archer's face. His smile lingered as he replied, “What do you think?”

Karina's face turned ghostly pale, her hands trembling as they clenched tightly.

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Archer's carefree expression hardened, his anger subsiding into a cold, calculating gaze as he narrowed his eyes. “That depends on your sincerity,” he said sharply.

Karina's face went pale as she spoke up quickly, desperation lacing her voice. “Jace doesn't know anything! He has nothing to do with my plan. Let him go this time.”

Archer's attention drifted to Jace's hands. For a moment, it seemed he wanted to take hold of them, but Jace pulled back effortlessly, his tone laced with hidden meaning. “Let's have a drink tonight.”

The tension melted away from Archer's face, replaced by an easy smile. “Alright. I'll wait for you.”

With that, Archer let go of Karina, and the man who had been with him disappeared.

Karina pushed herself up from the floor, her body trembling with pain from the whip marks. But the ache didn't stop her from bursting out, her voice sharp with alarm. "You're insane! Don't you realize he's a monster? If you go, you'll be walking straight to your death!"

The room was eerily quiet now, with just the two of them left.

Jace didn't respond immediately. His calm eyes glanced over her briefly as he reached into his pocket, pulling out a sterilized towel to meticulously wipe the hand that had touched Archer. The disgust in his expression was impossible to miss.

"It's not urgent," Jace finally said, his voice steady and indifferent.

Karina's frustration boiled over. "You told him you'd meet tonight! How can you act so calm? Do you really think you'll walk out unscathed?"

Jace turned his sharp gaze on her, his voice deliberate. "Are you enjoying your life right now?"

Karina hesitated, looking away as defiance flared in her eyes. "I'm fine. Don't worry about me. It's a hundred times better than you going to meet him!"

They had been born into the shadows, and their fates were tied to the darkness. But even so, they clung stubbornly to the scraps of dignity they still possessed.

Jace's expression remained tranquil, detached even, as if nothing in the world could rattle him. Yet, his fingers absently toyed with a string of beads hidden in his pocket. His voice, low and unwavering, carried a promise. "This life won't last much longer."

Karina snapped her head toward him, her face tightening in concern as she caught the grim smile curling at the corner of his lips. Something was off. "What are you planning to do?"

Jace didn't answer directly. Instead, he pulled out his scalpel and began wiping it with meticulous care.

Gloria looked over at Norah, concern etched on her face. "You need to eat something. If you don't, the baby will suffer too."

Norah hesitated, her hand protectively resting on her stomach. Kevin was still unconscious in the hospital, and the weight of it all had drained her energy.

"You're right," Norah finally relented. She wasn't just responsible for herself anymore.

The two women left the hospital to pick up food and supplies. Gloria stopped by a fruit tea shop, and after a long wait, she handed Norah a cup. "Here you go."

Norah reached for the tea, but it slipped from her fingers. Thankfully, Gloria caught it before it hit the ground.

“Norah, are you alright?” Gloria asked, her brow furrowing. “You look exhausted.”

Norah shook her head, baffled by her own clumsiness. “I don’t know... I meant to grab it, but my hand just let go.”

Could it still be the lingering effects of that injection?

Gloria handed the cup back, a bit more firmly this time. “Take it. Don’t drop it again!”

Norah managed a faint smile. “Got it.”

“I’m going to grab some pastries. You wait here,” Gloria said, heading toward a nearby bakery.

Norah sat by the window, her gaze drifting outside. Her thoughts spiraled, fixating on the red-haired woman and the unsettling sense of déjà vu she felt about her and Jace.

Suddenly, her eyes locked onto a figure standing across the street—a man with piercing brown eyes.

“Jace,” she whispered, standing abruptly.

Jace smiled at her, but there was an unmistakable sadness in his eyes.

Norah felt a pang of guilt. She thought of the harsh words she had once thrown at him. Had they wounded him? Could there be a deeper truth she had failed to see?

As the light changed, she hurried toward him, her heart racing with urgency. But by the time she crossed the street, he was gone. In his place, she found a basket of fresh strawberries.

Her heart sank.

Lifting the basket, she frantically searched the area. “Jace! Where are you? Don’t avoid me—I have questions for you!”

But Jace was nowhere to be seen. It was as though he had vanished into thin air, leaving only the strawberries behind.

“Norah!” Gloria called from across the street, panic in her voice. When she spotted Norah, she hurried over. “What’s going on? I thought something happened to you!”

Norah clutched the basket tightly, her voice soft and uncertain. “I was looking for someone. For Jace.”

Gloria frowned, scanning the street. "Jace? The handsome guy? If he was here, why didn't he wait for you?"

Norah stared at the basket in her hands, her thoughts muddled. "I don't know. He just left this for me."

Gloria sighed. "He's a strange one. Come on, let's head back to the hospital. You can think about this after we've eaten something."

Back at the hospital, the air was thick with commotion. Bianca, dressed impeccably as if straight out of Vanity Fair, stormed into the hallway, her sunglasses perched on her head. Her voice rang with urgency.

"Where's Kevin?!" she demanded.

A soldier stepped forward, blocking her path. "Captain Edwards is resting. No disturbances allowed."

Bianca's expression hardened, but she held her ground. "I need to see him."

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Bianca's panic was unmistakable as she pressed against the glass, her face pale. She grabbed the soldier in camouflage. "How is Kevin? Is he seriously injured? How could he be hurt so badly? When will he wake up?"

The man in uniform remained stoic. "We don't have the details. Young lady, please keep your voice down. If you wish to wait for Captain Edwards to wake, you'll need to wait outside."

Bianca's eyes were red, her voice trembling with anxiety. "How can he be in the ICU? Will he die like this?"

Her panic was palpable, but Gloria couldn't hold back a sharp comment. "Why's she so worried? She's not even his wife. Besides, how does she know Kevin's hurt? Was she behind this, trying to hurt you?"

Her suspicion was justified. Norah, too, felt uneasy. Kevin had been shot and admitted to the ICU just hours ago, yet nobody had been informed. How could Bianca possibly know this? It seemed too coincidental.

Norah approached, her expression unreadable. Bianca, flustered and desperate, spun around and pointed at her. "It's your fault! Kevin's hurt because of you! You're nothing but a burden to him—wherever you go, he gets dragged down with you!"

Unfazed, Norah calmly asked, "How do you know Kevin's hurt?"

Bianca faltered, clearly caught off guard. “Why couldn’t I know? I came looking for Kevin. He wasn’t here, and I asked Kian. He said Kevin was with you, and whenever he’s around you, he ends up hurt.”

Norah narrowed her eyes. “Your story doesn’t add up. You’re the first one to know. You must have inside information. Are you involved in this somehow?”

“Don’t talk nonsense!” Bianca snapped, flustered but trying to maintain control. “How could I hurt him? I’m just worried about Kevin! And what proof do you have that I’m involved? You can’t just slander me without evidence. I’m a big star now—I can sue you for defamation!”

Gloria, angry at Bianca’s arrogance, shot back, “You’re shameless! The thief shouts ‘catch the thief’—you’re the one who’s suspicious here!”

Bianca glared at Gloria. “Don’t talk to me like that. I’m here to see Kevin. If you don’t want trouble, keep quiet about my status.”

“What status?” Gloria laughed. “Aren’t you just an actress under Kevin’s company? By that logic, Norah’s your boss!”

Bianca’s fists clenched in frustration. “Wait for my aunt to come. If you want to stop arguing, shut your mouth!”

Norah fixed Bianca with a cold gaze. “Do you remember your reputation? You’re a public figure. If your ugly secrets get out, your career—and your freedom—will be over. You might want to reconsider your position.”

Bianca shot back with a cold stare. “Don’t worry, I value my reputation too much for that to happen.”

Norah didn’t back down. “You say that now, but we’ll see.”

The tension in the room thickened. Bianca’s cold stare promised nothing but trouble ahead.

“Ms. Lynch,” Norah continued, her voice steely, “we both know you’ve got something to hide. You’d better make sure you’re as innocent as you claim.”

Bianca turned to leave but shot one last glare at Norah. “You’ll regret this.”

The men in camouflage, recognizing Norah as Kevin’s wife, stepped in to escort Bianca out. “Miss, please leave. If you don’t, we’ll have to ask you to leave.”

Bianca’s glare could have cut glass, but she wasn’t foolish enough to challenge the armed men. With one final threat to Norah, she walked away, seething.

As Bianca exited, Gloria couldn’t suppress her laughter. “Look at her face! You really put her in her place. She hasn’t walked away this defeated in a long time.”

Norah's resolve only hardened. "This is just the beginning. I don't believe Bianca is as innocent as she's pretending. She's involved, and I won't let her off the hook."

Gloria, sensing the determination in Norah's voice, asked, "What do you plan to do?"

Norah's eyes burned with purpose. "She wants to be a star, right? Let's see where her dreams take her when everything falls apart."

The weight of the situation wasn't lost on Norah. She knew there were darker forces at play, and she was done playing nice.

As they stood there, Levi Racine, one of the soldiers guarding the ICU, spoke up. "Ma'am, you should rest. I'll stay here and let you know the moment Captain Edwards wakes up."

Norah, exhausted but driven, asked, "What's your name?"

"Levi Racine," the man replied. "I used to serve under Captain Kevin Edwards."

Norah's gaze hardened. "Those people who attacked Kevin—did they know they would injure him? They missed, but they clearly wanted him dead."

Levi hesitated, clearly unsure about sharing information, but finally said, "Once Captain Edwards wakes up, you can ask him directly. It's better coming from him."

Norah didn't press further. She was mentally drained, and being pregnant made it harder to keep up the pace. She knew it was time to go home and regroup.

Once back, Gwen opened the door, concerned when she saw the late hour. "Why are you back so late? You look like you've had a rough day."

Norah and Gloria exchanged a quiet look, agreeing not to worry Gwen. "We just had a long day of shopping, and we were closer to home, so we came back together."

Gwen didn't push further. She made them some tea and chatted with Gloria, but Norah excused herself, her mind still racing.

She needed to find answers—and she wasn't going to stop until she had them.

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When Norah hadn't emerged from the study for a while, Gwen grew concerned and walked in to check on her.

"What are you looking for?" Gwen asked, seeing Norah frantically searching through the room.

Norah looked up, her face tense. "Mom, I remember that Dad used to collect newspapers. I should have one of them here."

Jack had a habit of collecting newspapers, storing them neatly in a box. It should have been easy to find, but Norah was struggling.

Seeing her daughter's frustration, Gwen's face changed. She stepped closer with a smile. "What newspaper are you looking for? Let me help."

Norah hesitated for a moment. "It's the one from when I was in junior high school. I'm sure I have it."

Gwen's concern grew as she saw Norah's urgency. "Which issue? You were in junior high for three years. Which one are you talking about?"

Norah, a bit more casually now, said, "The one where I was kidnapped. It was a big deal at the time, so it should have been in the papers."

Gwen's face changed as she processed what Norah had said. "Why are you looking for that? What are you hoping to find?"

Norah paused and locked eyes with her mother. "Lately, I've been feeling... strange. I thought maybe reading that newspaper could help jog my memory."

Without a word, Gwen took Norah's hand, gently leading her away from the search. "Don't go digging up painful memories. Why remind yourself of something like that? Besides, Dad's collection isn't organized by date. If you can't find it, it might not even be there."

Norah, still uncertain, asked again, "Are you sure there's nothing?"

"No," Gwen said firmly, though there was a hint of worry in her voice. "If you can't find it, maybe it's for the best. What's really bothering you? What have you been thinking about lately?"

Norah continued searching, but the absence of the newspapers only deepened her unease. Something wasn't right.

She sighed. "It's nothing, really. Just a nightmare."

Gwen's expression darkened. "A nightmare? You've been having nightmares? Maybe you need more rest."

Norah didn't want to go into the recent dangerous events. She didn't want to worry Gwen. "It's just work stress," she said. "I'll be fine."

Gwen wasn't convinced. "I'll make you some soothing soup to help you sleep better. You've been pushing yourself too hard. You need to take care of yourself."

"Thanks, Mom," Norah said softly. "I will."

Gwen continued with a worried smile, "And about Kevin... how are you two doing? Is everything okay in your marriage?"

That question made Norah pause. Should she stay with Kevin or leave him?

Kevin had been there for her, even putting his life on the line for her. He was lying in the hospital, fighting for his life. If she even considered divorce now, it felt wrong. She didn't want her child to grow up without a father either.

Seeing Norah hesitate, Gwen offered her a gentle but firm piece of advice. "Whatever you decide, just make sure it's something you can live with. Don't do anything you'll regret."

Norah smiled reassuringly at Gwen. "I know, Mom. I'll think it through."

"Good," Gwen said, giving her daughter one last hug. "I'll make that soup now. You should talk to Gloria while I do."

"Okay, Mom," Norah replied.

Gwen smiled. "You don't need to worry so much about me. All I want is for you to be happy and safe."

Norah's heart swelled with love for her mother. It meant the world to her to have such a supportive family.

Meanwhile, Jack had gotten up and was offering them fruit, his concern evident as he fussed over Norah.

"Dad, you don't need to keep getting up for me," Norah said, grateful but trying not to be a burden.

"What are you talking about?" Jack replied with a loving smile. "It's never too late for you to come home."

Gloria entered the room, a little flustered. "I've been busy with work, but I still keep in touch with Norah. Sorry I didn't bring anything."

"Just you being here is enough," Jack said warmly. "You're like family."

Jack stood up to check on Gwen, and Norah, still feeling uneasy, sat down with Gloria in the living room.

"What were you looking for earlier?" Gloria asked as Norah settled in. "Did you find it?"

"A newspaper," Norah answered, her tone casual but her mind still swirling with unease.

"What newspaper?" Gloria asked, her curiosity piqued.

“The one from when I was in junior high. There was a murder case, and I wanted to find that issue.”

Gloria’s face tightened. “Why bring that up? It’s not something you should be dwelling on.”

Norah didn’t want to remember, but she felt it was necessary. There was something important she was missing, and she needed to understand it.

“I don’t want to remember it,” Norah said quietly. “But I can’t shake the feeling that what’s happening now is somehow connected to my past.”

Gloria raised an eyebrow. “You’re not seriously thinking it’s some kind of revenge, are you? This sounds like something out of a spy movie.”

Norah couldn’t help but worry. “It could be, but I’m not so sure. Bianca seems involved, but it’s not that simple.”

In the kitchen, Gwen was distracted, chopping pears, but her thoughts were heavy. Her anxiety over Norah’s search had affected her more than she realized, and she cut her hand in the process. Jack quickly took her hand, gently rinsing the wound in water.

“What’s going on, Gwen? You’re distracted, and now you’ve hurt yourself.”

Gwen looked out toward the living room, her voice low. “Jack, I think Norah’s starting to remember.”

Jack’s expression darkened. “How is that possible?”

“She’s been looking for that newspaper again,” Gwen said, her eyes filling with worry. “What if she remembers too much?”

Jack held Gwen close, reassuring her. “Don’t worry. If Norah remembers, maybe it’s meant to be. We’ll help her through it.”

Gwen, still fearful, leaned into his embrace, tears slipping down her cheeks. “I’m scared she won’t be able to handle it.”

“Don’t be afraid,” Jack murmured. “She’ll be okay.”

Later that night, Norah and Gloria, exhausted from the day, shared a cup of soothing soup Gwen had prepared. It worked wonders, and before long, they were fast asleep.

But in the quiet of the night, Norah had another nightmare.

The cries of many voices echoed through the darkness. The room was thick with the smell of blood, and laughter—cruel and hollow—filled the air. A face appeared in her dream, twisted in a grotesque smile.

Norah woke up, gasping for air.

“Norah, are you having nightmares again?” Gloria’s voice was soft but filled with concern.

Norah was drenched in sweat, her body trembling as she tried to shake off the haunting images. “Just a nightmare,” she said, her voice shaky.

“Nightmares again? Maybe it’s time to seek some peace,” Gloria suggested. “We could try praying God, something to help calm your mind.”

Norah wasn’t sure what would help, but the feeling that something sinister was at play didn’t go away.