

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 581 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 581

Jeffrey scooped up the oncoming Langston in one swift move, lifting him off the ground effortlessly.

"Mr. Turner, you woke up from the hospital?" Langston's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Yep! And look who's come to see me," Jeffrey teased as he playfully pinched Langston's nose. "My little champ even made a wish for me to wake up, huh?"

Jeffrey genuinely adored Langston, the kid was sharp as a tack and bore an uncanny resemblance to Everett!

As they started catching up, Karen led Abigail over to join them reluctantly.

Jeffrey pretended to be casual as he greeted, "Here to pick up Dorothy?"

"Yeah."

"And this must be Abigail?" Jeffrey's eyes lit up as he looked at the little girl Karen was holding by the hand.

Abigail's skin was porcelain-white, her big double-lidded eyes and rosy lips made her the spitting image of a delicate doll!

There was hardly a soul who wouldn't marvel at Abigail's prettiness.

Karen simply responded with a distant monosyllabic, "Yeah."

Jeffrey didn't bother to argue. He walked over to Abigail and gently caressed her cheek, saying, "You look more like your mom! I'm jealous of Everett, that lucky dog. He's got both Abigail and Langston, and here I am, without a single munchkin of my own!"

He threw a pointed glance at Karen, who seemed to ignore his comment completely.

Walking side by side toward the arrivals lounge, they barely spoke. Jeffrey didn't initiate conversation, and Karen certainly wasn't going to start one.

Finding a spot to sit down, Karen pulled out two candy bars from her bag and handed them to Abigail and Langston.

Watching Karen alternating between kissing Abigail and playfully roughhousing with Langston, Jeffrey thought to himself that if they ever had kids, she'd make a wonderful mother. Surprisingly, she seemed to really enjoy being around children.

"Ahem." Jeffrey cleared his throat subtly to catch her attention.

"What is it?" Karen finally looked up.

"Oh, just wondering... how about that thing you were considering? It's over a week's time now," Jeffrey prodded.

Karen had not reached out to him in the past week, and he hadn't made the first move either, mainly because he felt he'd already made enough of a fool of himself without any sign of her relenting. He figured it was time to salvage some dignity.

"It's the same as before," Karen said, with a nonchalance that suggested she was talking about the weather rather than their relationship.

"Still the same issue?"

"Yes."

"Karen, I used to be a party animal, but I swear I've changed! I've been at work during the day and straight back home after it. I've even ignored invites to go out for drinks – you can check my chat history!"

He had even turned down his buddies who came to his doorstep, enticing him to hit the bars. Jeffrey was trying to prove a point, to show Karen he was serious about change.

"Even if you swear off partying forever, it wouldn't change anything between us. Jeffrey, I just don't like you. How can you not see that?" Karen didn't want to be so blunt, especially with the kids there.

Jeffrey clenched his jaw.

"You once said you liked my face."

"That was strictly about your face! And now look at this scar, all thanks to Heather. It's just irksome to me."

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Jeffrey was fuming, his frustration reaching top as he scooped up Langston and marched over to confront Karen.

"Why are you bringing up Heather again?"

"It's the truth, why can't I mention it? I hate her, plain and simple. Do I have to lie just to be with you?"

"You—"

He always said he loved to party, but he could change that. He could cut ties with his high-society friends. After all, they often needed him more than he needed them. But every time Karen brought up Heather, Jeffrey just didn't know what to do.

It was something from the past, unchangeable.

He couldn't rewrite history even if he wanted to.

Langston watched the back-and-forth, sensing something more but not quite sure what it was. Venturing a guess, he asked, "Aunt Karen, you dislike Mr. Turner?"

Without hesitation, Karen nodded. "Absolutely, I hate him."

"But Mr. Turner is really handsome! Aunt Karen, you always daydream looking at those hunky celebrities' pictures, even saying you wish to marry one. Why would you dislike Mr. Turner? I think he's way more handsome than those movie stars."

Karen was at a loss for words.

Jeffrey chuckled through his nose, rubbing Langston's cheek, "That's my boy, Langston, knows quality when he sees it! Unlike someone..."

"He's handsome? Langston, have you not seen the scar on his face? That thing's gonna stick for life!" Karen, never one to back down, retaliated, "Let me tell you a secret, that scar is a lifelong reminder from Mr. Turner's beloved woman!"

"What beloved woman?" Jeffrey retorted without thinking, "When did Heather become my beloved? Karen, can you stop making things up in your head?"

"Did I say your beloved was Heather? No, you're the one who brought her up!"

Jeffrey was speechless.

Karen shrugged, lifting Abigail onto her lap, "Stop wasting your time on me, Mr. Turner. Go have your fun, don't hold back on my account. I wouldn't want you to feel all pent up!"

Jeffrey's eyes narrowed, his frustration palpable as he took several deep breaths, "Just remember, we still have one more time. And until then, better not let me catch you with another man, or you'll regret it!"

The threat hung in the air, as menacing as if he had vowed to give her a good thrashing.

Just the thought of it made her stomach churn.

"Are you kidding? So you're saying I should stay single forever until you decide to settle your score with me?"

"Fine by me. There's no shortage of women hoping I'll turn their way. I won't miss one."

"Hah, count me out of that."

Karen despised the idea of clinging onto a relationship that was clearly over, of being the woman who couldn't let go.

She was always the type to pick up and let go with ease. When she was with someone, she loved fiercely and purely, playing the part of the doting lover. But the moment she found out her ex was cheating, she packed up her things and left his place without a second thought. She cut off all contact with him. Even after he tried to win her back for months, she didn't budge an inch.

Once tainted, she had no room in her heart for spoiled affection.

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So Karen reckoned, if she got involved with a guy like Jeffrey, his chances of cheating were like 99.9999%. She wasn't full of herself, thinking she could be that one-in-a-million exception.

In the end, it would just be a breakup with wasted time and wasted emotions. What would be such a relationship come for?

For his chiseled body, his handsome face?

Karen scoffed.

Sure, he was easy on the eyes, no denying that. But after that one time he got a scar, it wasn't the same. His physique was fine, but when it came to the physical stuff, they were totally out of sync – it was agony for her!

All things considered, there were no good for them to be together – just forget it.

“If you had already made up your mind not to go for it, why did you tell me you'd think about it?”

“What, and you would have let me go otherwise?” Karen figured Jeffrey wasn't dumb; he should have caught on to her intentions that day.

Him coming to ask about it today was just plain stupid.

“So, what, you're going to keep going on blind dates?” Jeffrey had to keep his cool because of the kids around.

“What's it to you? It's not like I'm your girlfriend! You talk as if I'm sneaking around behind your back.” Karen whipped out her smartphone, pulled up her WhatsApp, and showed it to Jeffrey. “See this guy at the top? My parents introduced us. We've been chatting well, no need for a formal date. We hit it off, so you might as well move on and look for your next conquest.”

Karen believed that for Jeffrey, it was all about the chase – a fixation on what he couldn't have. It was just a relentless desire to win over the unattainable.

She knew his lines worked on plenty of women. With his rugged good looks, chiseled features and that bad-boy charm, he could've easily been a star. She herself had been captivated by that face, curious to see if the rumors about his prowess were true or if it was all just show.

But once you get what you're fixated on, the charm would vanish, right?

As if she could bewitch Jeffrey and have him remain loyally besotted with her forever. Listen to that idea – it's not just ridiculous, it's downright delusional.

And sure enough, what did Jeffrey see from the screen of Karen's phone? The last message was a sweet “Goodnight, sleep tight!” from the guy.

Their conversation was indeed heating up.

Jeffrey was grinding his teeth hard enough to make a sound.

“Delete it, Karen. Now.”

“Why on earth should I listen to you?”

Jeffrey clenched his fist, “You really think I won't drag you out in front of him and give him a show he'll never forget?”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“Don’t make me say it again!”

Karen snorted and turned to shield Abigail, ignoring him.

There were kids around. She knew Jeffrey wouldn't cause a scene.

But he didn't lay a finger on her. Instead, he snatched her phone!

“What the hell are you doing, Jeffrey?”

“What's the unlock code?”

“I'm not telling you!”

He smirked, “Fine.”

He set Langston down, then took Karen's phone and smashed it to the ground with all his might.

Instantly, the phone shattered into pieces.

Passersby started staring at them, their expressions a mix of shock and curiosity.

The move left Karen stunned. Abigail and Langston were a bit scared too.

“Jeffrey, what the hell is wrong with you?”

Karen hurried to embrace both kids, trying to soothe them.

“I'll get you a new one. That phone is tainted after you've used it to chat with other men!”

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Karen was seething, her temples throbbing with frustration. "What if I get a new phone? I can still log onto WhatsApp."

"Then I'll smash another one!" Jeffrey's voice boomed.

Who could stand being taunted by Karen like this? Especially Jeffrey Turner, a man who was usually treated like royalty by women. How could he stand such humiliation?

Karen rubbed her temples, trying to soothe the pounding headache.

She had seen women cling to trust-fund heirs before, but never had she seen one so persistent!

"You're being completely unreasonable," she exploded.

Sensing the tension, Langston hurried over to Jeffrey, taking his hand in an attempt to ease the situation. "Mr. Turner, do you like Aunt Karen?"

"I do not! She's a flirtatious woman!"

Karen didn't want to respond. But unfortunately, little Abigail overheard.

She tilted her head, her big eyes blinking in confusion. "Aunt Karen, what does 'flirtatious' mean? Is that a type of flower?"

Karen was at a loss for words.

"Is that man saying you're like a flower?"

"He can't say anything nice, Abigail. Promise Aunt Karen you'll never deal with men like him. Men who get angry when they can't get what they want!" Karen was more upset about her phone than anything else. She had just bought it not long ago.

Holding Langston in his arms, Jeffrey stepped closer to Karen. "Everett and Dorothy are about to land. I'll let the phone go. I'll have it delivered to your parent's place. Just delete that guy after you get it."

"I won't delete him," Karen stated defiantly.

Soon Dorothy would be back, and Karen would have someone to back her up. Jeffrey wouldn't dare lay a finger on her!

She knew that once Dorothy heard about this, she would tell Everett and Jeffrey would be the one to suffer.

"What, you want to make a scene in front of him?" Jeffrey didn't mind putting on a show.

In the end, it wouldn't be him who'd be embarrassed, but Karen would.

"Good luck finding out who he is first!"

With that, Karen stood up, scooping Abigail into her arms, and headed toward the arrivals gate.

Jeffrey clenched his jaw in frustration.

Langston tugged at his shirt. "Mr. Turner, you can't act like this! You should learn from my dad."

"Learn from your dad? It took him over a decade to win her over. Am I supposed to follow that?"

"What?"

"The worst at chasing girls is your dad! Always with that slow-boil approach. One day, the frog's going to hop away and he'll be left with regrets!"

Langston pouted, pondering for a moment before replying, "My mom's no frog."

"It's just a metaphor!"

"Well, she's not!"

"Alright, alright, she isn't."

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Everett and Dorothy made their way through the VIP exit, stepping off the plane before anyone else.

From a distance, Dorothy spotted Karen holding her daughter and Jeffrey with her son.

Surprisingly, the scene looked harmonious.

Dorothy was about to hurry over when she felt the large hand holding hers tremble slightly.

She looked up to see Everett's gaze fixed on Abigail, his jawline taut.

Was he nervous?

"Abigail loves sweets. A little candy can win her over," Dorothy reassured him gently, patting his hand. "She must really like you after all the treats you've given her."

Everett looked down at her. "Dorothy, I still owe her five dollars."

"What?"

"I didn't know she's really my daughter. Yours and mine."

From the very first moment Everett laid eyes on Abigail, she stood out to him like a beacon in the night, and he felt an inexplicable pull towards her.

He had thought it was merely because her eyes reminded him of Dorothy. But as fate would have its twisted dance, it turned out that Abigail was his own flesh and blood.

"Yes, she's our daughter," Dorothy said, sensing the storm of emotions within him and taking his hand in comfort. "Come on, they're all waiting for us."

Everett's gaze rested on the little girl's face, and he nodded slightly.

"Alright."

"Mommy! Mommy, I'm over here!"

Spotting Dorothy, Abigail waved her small arms frantically.

Upon seeing the man next to her mother, Abigail's face fell into a pout.

"Aren't you that... that man?"

The man who took the money from her and didn't bring back any candy!

Langston, ever the unflappable brother, tugged at his sister's sleeve, "He's Dad."

Langston knew his sister was stubborn and decided to let it be.

As Dorothy and Everett approached, Karen greeted them with a smile, "Tired, Dorothy? Did you catch some sleep on the flight?"

"I did, slept the whole way," Dorothy replied with a smile, bending down to embrace her children.

But as she did, pain flashed across her face, and she winced.

Everett quickly took Abigail into his arms, saving Dorothy from the discomfort.

Abigail's big eyes sparkled, "Sir, where's my five dollars?"

Everett had prepared for this moment. He pulled out a hundred-dollar note from his pocket, "Here you go, repaid in full."

He had made sure to have it ready first thing in the morning.

But to his surprise, Abigail pushed the note back, "I don't need that much, just five dollars! Mommy won't let me spend a hundred!"

Everyone couldn't help but chuckle at her reaction.

Dorothy sighed with fond exasperation, "If I give you a hundred, you'd spend it all on candy. What about your teeth then?"

Jeffrey had been holding Langston the whole time. Watching the playful banter, his grievances seemed to melt away.

"Why don't we head to the car? Find a place to eat and chat, the airport's no place to linger."

Dorothy nodded, "Sounds good."

With everyone's agreement, Jeffrey, still holding Langston, turned to leave. Everett stepped forward, but noticed Dorothy lagging behind, who was pulled aside by Karen.

"You guys go ahead to eat, I'll pass," Karen said, her mood soured by the thought of having to buy a new phone thanks to Jeffrey.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't want to see Jeffrey. He's a piece of work." Karen was clearly not looking forward to dealing with him again.

Dorothy glanced at Jeffrey and asked with concern, "What did he do to you this time?"

"Don't get me started. I don't even want to talk about him!"

Karen rolled her eyes dismissively.

"Karen, Everett and I just got here. Let's have a meal together. If you leave midway, it'll be awkward for me to explain. Can you endure it for a while? What do you say?"

With Dorothy putting it that way, Karen relented with a nod, "Alright."

"Don't worry, I'm here for you. If Jeffrey steps out of line, I've got your back."

Karen opened her mouth as if to reveal the incident with her phone, but then closed it, choosing to keep the peace.

After all, today was a day of reunion and joy, and she didn't want to be the one to spoil it.

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Jeffrey had rented a spacious SUV for the pick-up, having calculated the headcount early in the morning.

No sooner had Jeffrey slid behind the wheel than Everett tapped on the driver's side window. "What's the deal with you and Karen?" he asked.

Though Everett hadn't overheard the earlier conversation between Dorothy and Karen, it didn't take a genius to figure out it was about Jeffrey.

"Nothing. She's got another blind date lined up, and I'm angry."

"You're not exactly her knight in shining armor, you know. You're overstepping," Everett chided him.

Jeffrey raised an eyebrow. "Aren't I your dude? Are you that scared of getting on Dorothy's bad side?"

"Yeah, terrified."

Jeffrey shook his head. His dude was a lost cause!

Soon after, Dorothy and Karen climbed into the SUV and took the back seats, while the kids settled into the middle row. Everyone was silent, as if bound by an unspoken agreement.

That is, until Abigail couldn't hold back any longer. She stealthily poked Everett, "Forget the money. Can you treat me to some candy instead?"

Without hesitation, Everett nodded. "Sure."

From the driver's seat, Jeffrey chuckled. "Your dad could buy you all the candy stores in Eldorria City!"

"Really?" Abigail's innocent eyes lit up.

Karen was quick to interject. "Jeffrey, don't fill her head with nonsense. Abigail has bad teeth. Every time I take her to the dentist, she always cries in pain!"

There was an awkward silence.

Karen had assumed the role of Abigail's protective mom. Jeffrey knew better than to cross her, especially since she'd just let Everett's promise to buy candy slide.

Dorothy smiled. "Just for today, Abigail can have a little candy!"

"Yay! Can we get some for my big brother too?" Abigail pointed at Langston, who was sitting beside her.

Langston looked up, deadpan. "I want a new computer."

Candy was kid's stuff to him, hardly a worthy bribe.

"Sure, I'll get it for you," Everett said, clearly incapable of denying his children anything.

Dorothy sighed. "You don't have to spoil them so much."

"They're my kids. They can have whatever they want."

Jeffrey turned to look at Everett, snorting. "We're nothing alike. I wish I had kids."

With that remark, he glanced at Karen through the rear-view mirror, but she was too preoccupied with the children to notice.

Arriving at the restaurant, Dorothy's phone buzzed as she stepped out of the car. She cast a quick glance at Everett, who was lifting Abigail from her seat. Then she checked the message.

It was from Kenneth. "Landed yet?"

Dorothy pursed her lips before replying. "Yeah, we're all out for dinner. Karen's here too."

"The kids aren't coming home tonight, right? Do you have everything you need over there? Abigail needs her bedtime storybook and her stuffed toys. I checked her room, and they're still there. Should I have someone drop them off?"

He suggested sending someone else, avoiding the scene himself.

Kenneth didn't want to witness their family's harmony.

Dorothy exhaled slowly. "I'll pick them up. I'll swing by after dinner."

She couldn't avoid Kenneth forever. It was inevitable they'd cross paths.

Not visiting him upon returning was bad enough.

As Dorothy finished typing, she looked up to find Everett's gaze fixed on her. She opened her mouth to explain, but he beat her to it.

"I'll pick them up. You don't have to go."

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"Everett..."

"I owe him some thanks," Everett said, curling his lips slightly. "Don't worry, it's just a thank-you visit."

How could he dare do anything to Kenneth?

In the restaurant, with Everett and Dorothy stepping out for a moment, it left only Jeffrey and Karen with the two kids again.

Karen pulled out chairs for Abigail and Langston before seating herself between them.

Seeing that, Jeffrey took the seat next to Langston.

"Mr. Turner, you wanna swap seats?" Langston asked with a mischievous arch of his brow.

"No need, I'm good here," Jeffrey replied, aware that his earlier temper tantrum with her phone might have been too much. So he kept quiet, trying to behave.

Karen, as if she couldn't see him, was busily digging in her purse for candy to give Abigail.

Suddenly, she noticed Jeffrey pull out his phone and offer it to her, "Use mine for now. My secretary's out buying a new one."

"No need." Karen was frosty, not sparing him an extra glance.

"Karen, can you at least consider my feelings? You flaunt chats with your date right in front of me and expect me to keep cool?"

He'd be a fool to let that slide!

Karen continued her silence, bending down to fuss with Abigail's hair.

"Aunt Karen's only got this one piece of candy left. Eat it quick before your mom spots it, or we'll both be in trouble."

Abigail looked up, "Mommy said I could have sweets today!"

"But if you have this one, Mommy won't buy you any others."

"Then I'll just eat it secretly."

Karen's laugh at the comment made Jeffrey lose his train of thought.

Before this moment, Jeffrey had thought Karen plain, especially compared to his exes or flings. But watching her interactions with Abigail, the warm smile and the solitary dimple that showed up, he found her unexpectedly sweet.

Even if her features weren't stunning, they didn't detract from her appeal.

"Karen, I just realized, you're kinda—"

Before he could finish, Karen cut him off.

"Can you just be quiet? If you keep talking, I'm leaving. I'm only staying for Dorothy's sake."

Jeffrey was at a loss for words.

"Who I chat with on WhatsApp is none of your business! I just showed it to you to help you understand I'm not into you. I simply don't want a future with you!"

She wanted to kill any hope he might have.

"You like that guy that much?" Jeffrey couldn't stand the thought of losing to an average Joe!

In Eldorria City, in terms of looks, background, power and wealth, he only acknowledged Everett as his better.

"That's my freedom. I like who I like! As long as I'm not bothering you, Mr. Turner, isn't that enough? It's you who's disrupting my life now, get it?"

Karen's furrowed brows made her point.

The fire in Jeffrey's chest surged, but today was not the day to lose his temper.

But being publicly humiliated again and again was more than he could stand.

"Ha, you think I actually like you? Let me just tell you the truth—I regret what happened last time. I'm just worried you might get pregnant. I have to keep an eye out! What if you sleep with your date, get pregnant, and then try to pin it on me? I'd have to—"

Smack!

His words were cut short by a slap that landed squarely on his face.

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Jeffrey was utterly shell-shocked.

His words came to an abrupt halt.

Langston was wide-eyed as he glanced between Mr. Turner and Aunt Karen.

Abigail, blissfully unaware, had been too preoccupied with her candy to notice anything amiss. But once the silence sunk in, she edged closer to Langston, "Brother, what's wrong with Aunt Karen?"

Langston quickly clamped a hand over her mouth. "Uh... Mr. Turner, Aunt Karen, I'm going to check why mom hasn't come in yet with Abigail!"

With that, he whisked Abigail off by the hand and darted out.

Watching Langston and Abigail leave, Karen snapped back to reality and stood up abruptly. "Enjoy your meal, I'm heading home."

Before she could make it to the door, a firm grip caught her wrist.

Karen looked down at Jeffrey as she spoke with a harsh tone, "Don't worry, there's no chance of pregnancy. I've taken pills for prevention."

"I wasn't actually—"

"Even if I did sleep with my blind date and got pregnant, I wouldn't come to you. You can record that for evidence! So, Mr. Turner, there's no need to keep up the charade. Everyone finds it quite disgusting, don't you think?"

Her words sounded almost casual, but each one was laden with biting sarcasm.

For reasons Jeffrey couldn't fathom—seeing as he prided himself on being a gentleman who wouldn't speak so harshly to a lady—whenever he was around Karen, it was as if his mouth disconnected from his brain and started spouting nonsense!

"Hold on a sec! Let me get this straight..." Jeffrey's face still bore the bright imprint of a slap, and his recent car accident injuries were yet to heal, giving him a rather disheveled appearance.

To his surprise, Karen didn't immediately storm off. Instead, she stood there, watching him as if waiting to see what else he could possibly say. Maybe it was time to clear the air once and for all.

Jeffrey ran a hand through his hair in frustration, licked his dry lips and slumped back in his chair with a deflated sigh.

"Damn it, I'm just not good at this pursuit thing. I've tried everything I know. How about you just tell me straight—how exactly am I supposed to chase you?"

He had been holding back for a week!

He hadn't called Karen and hadn't loitered under her apartment, forcing himself to focus on work instead.

He had secretly hoped a few days apart might lessen his feelings for Karen, or even lead him to give up entirely.

But that hadn't happened at all!

The moment he saw Karen, he still wanted to be close to her. Seeing her say goodnight to another man made him want to smash her phone—and the other guy's too!

"Chase me? Weren't you worried about me getting pregnant?"

"That was all said in anger. Can't you tell? In all my years, I've always been careful, always used protection—except with you."

Jeffrey caught himself mid-sentence, "You're special to me!"

"Well, thank you very much! After taking the morning-after pill, I was throwing up all day, too dizzy to get out of bed. Am I supposed to be grateful for your exception?"

"That's not what I meant!"

Karen took a deep breath, sensing Dorothy and the others would be returning soon, so she decided to cut to the chase.

"So, you say you want to chase me, even marry me, right?"

"Yes!" Jeffrey perked up immediately.

"Fine, I'll agree. But you have to transfer all your assets to me and sign a prenup. If after we're married you stray, stay out all night, get too cozy with other women, keep in touch with ex- girlfriends, or cheat—break any one of these rules, you'll agree to divorce and leave with nothing!"

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He stood there, tongue-tied and silent for an awkwardly long time.

Karen burst into laughter. "Got cold feet, huh? Leave me alone from now on, okay?"

She shrugged off Jeffrey's grasp and strutted out.

Only a few steps out, she bumped into Dorothy and Everett walking straight towards her.

The moment Dorothy laid eyes on Karen, she pieced together most of the story. She turned slightly to Everett and said, "I need to have a word with Karen. Take the kids inside, will you?"

Everett nodded in understanding. "Alright."

As Karen approached, Dorothy reached out and grabbed her arm.

"Leaving already?"

"Yeah, I just can't bear to sit with Jeffrey any longer." Karen's eyes felt dry, but there were no tears—nor the inclination to shed them.

Jeffrey wasn't worth it.

"I'll drive you home," Dorothy offered, seeing Karen's reluctance to elaborate and choosing not to pry. "Your parents' place or Kenneth's?"

"I'll catch a cab. Don't trouble yourself, especially after a flight. You must be exhausted." Karen patted Dorothy's shoulder with a smile. "I'm fine. I just genuinely can't stand Jeffrey. Don't worry about it."

"Is there something between you two?"

"Nothing but a couple of flings—hardly sweet memories. Consider it like sampling some fancy fruit!" Karen laughed, her carefree demeanor almost making Dorothy feel herself overly concerned.

"Okay, then. If anything comes up, or if Jeffrey bugs you again, give me a call."

Karen shrugged nonchalantly. "I doubt he will."

Judging by Jeffrey's surprised and confused reaction earlier, he probably thought she was getting too big for her boots.

But Karen was speaking her mind, not hiding her feelings. Being with a playboy like Jeffrey wasn't about love. It was about whether she could pick herself up after being kicked to the curb by him!

If Jeffrey had agreed earlier, she would have married him on the spot. After all, should he cheat later, she could always divorce and get her share of the assets. That sounded much better than wasting years only to end up with nothing.

"Why?" Dorothy seemed confused, not quite catching Karen's drift.

Karen smiled. "Dorothy, men like Everett are rare, maybe one in a million. Jeffrey definitely isn't one."

Dorothy remained silent.

"Bye, we'll talk tomorrow!"

"Sure."

Dorothy watched Karen take a taxi and then turned back to the restaurant.

Inside, Jeffrey was chatting with Langston, though he seemed distracted.

Everett glanced up at Dorothy. "She's gone?"

"Yeah."

Dorothy sat down, her gaze fixed on Jeffrey.

"Jeffrey, let Karen go. You two aren't right for each other."

Jeffrey tensed for a moment, then gave a tight-lipped nod. "I know."

Everett knew what Karen meant to Dorothy. She had been starved of familial affection since childhood, and the love Karen offered her was probably more than anyone else's. In Dorothy's eyes, Karen was her sister.

With a serious tone, Everett said, "Let's turn the page on this one, Jeffrey."

"Yeah." Jeffrey's response was muffled, his mood evidently sour.

Truth be told, Dorothy could see that Jeffrey had feelings for Karen. But flirting was one thing, and marriage was another. Karen might entertain a romance with Jeffrey, but when it came to marriage, they were a mismatch.

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 590 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 590

The dinner was supposed to be a cozy affair, just a casual meal to catch up and chat. But in the end, things took an unexpected turn, leaving everyone a tad uneasy.

Jeffrey barely touched his food before excusing himself with the 'urgent business at the office' line and made his exit.

Once the door had closed behind the last of the guests, Dorothy murmured, "I'm not holding a grudge against Jeffrey. If Karen really had a thing for him, my opinion wouldn't matter. But she's made it clear that she's not into his playboy ways."

"I get it. You don't have to explain," Everett said. He understood her concern all too well.

Yet he couldn't help but think that Jeffrey had really blown it this time.

He had never seen him like this before!

As a longtime friend, Everett wanted to lend a hand to Jeffrey, but the guy had to go and fall for Dorothy's protégé – Karen, the untouchable. What help could he possibly offer now?

After everyone had left, Everett asked Kevin to take the kids, Abigail and Langston, back to their place at Bay Residence.

"Go with them. I'll just grab something from Kenneth and I'll be right there."

Dorothy watched the kids pile into the car, but hesitated to follow.

"I'll come with you," she offered.

"Worried I'll take a swing at Kenneth?" Everett's voice was calm, but it was the eerie calm before a storm.

He had every intention of just saying thanks, but seeing Dorothy so protective was igniting a rage he was struggling to contain.

He hated the idea of her worrying about the other man.

Dorothy took Everett's hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze, "I'm just worried you two might clash."

She knew Kenneth well enough – all polished manners and gentle smiles, but with a temper beneath that composed surface. And today, of all days, he must be in a foul mood. A confrontation with Everett would just brew trouble that no one could contain, and the two men were not exactly equals in a fight.

"Who would you be more worried about getting hurt in a clash?" Everett asked, despite himself.

Kenneth was like a thorn in his side, uncomfortable and irksome whenever touched.

"It's you of course! You're still recovering from your injury."

His eyebrow quirked in challenge, "You think I can't beat him?"

"You can!" Dorothy assured hastily, "I've never doubted that. You've got the height advantage and all, but you're still healing from a through-and-through!"

"So, you'd be worried for me?"

"Duh." Dorothy rolled her eyes and looped her arm through his, "I'm coming with you. It's not just you who should thank him. I should too."

Avoiding the issue wouldn't solve anything, and she still had to convince Kenneth to let go and find himself a girlfriend.

Everett looked into her eyes, searching for any trace of affection for Kenneth. Finding none, his irritation eased slightly.

"Alright, let's go together."

They got into the car Kevin had ready for them, and Dorothy dialed Kenneth's number.

"Kenneth, I'm on my way over to pick up some things."

"Alright," Kenneth's voice was as calm and smooth as ever, "Is Karen with you?"

"She's not. She went back to her parents' place."

"Oh," There was a brief pause before he asked, "So, who are you with?"

Dorothy glanced at Everett, who was watching her intently.

Just making a call, and she could feel the tension radiating off him, nothing like someone about to express gratitude.

"I'm with Everett."

Chapter 591

Dorothy spilled the beans because she wanted Kenneth to brace himself, and also because she didn't want to upset Everett.

He was touchy about these matters, especially when it came to anything regarding Kenneth.

As they drove towards Kenneth's place, Dorothy tried a few times to strike up a conversation to lift the heavy mood. It just didn't seem right, given what was coming, but she couldn't quite figure out what to say.

It was only as they were nearly there that Everett spoke up in a low voice.

"Don't worry, I promised no bickering," he paused for emphasis, "for the kids' sake."

"That's a relief," Dorothy finally felt relieved; she gave him a smile, "Just think of Kenneth as my big brother, okay?"

"I can do that. But can he treat you like a sister?"

Silence.

The tension was still as thick as ever.

Choosing to stay quiet, Dorothy decided to wait and see how the meeting would unfold.

They pulled up to Kenneth's place and Everett got out first, then went around to the trunk to retrieve a paper bag.

By the time Dorothy got out, Everett was waiting by the car.

Before she could ask what was in the bag, Kenneth appeared. He was dressed in a casual black tracksuit, walking towards them.

"Dorothy, you've lost weight."

His first words were ones of concern for Dorothy.

Everett's brow furrowed instantly, and his lips formed a cold retort, "She hasn't lost weight."

Wasn't that basically accusing him of not taking good care of Dorothy?

How could he possibly neglect her?!

"Uh..." Dorothy hadn't expected a clash right from the first sentence.

Fortunately, it seemed Kenneth had no interest in a verbal spar. He merely offered a half-smile, "Alright then, I must be mistaken. Come in, let's talk."

He turned and walked back inside. Dorothy gave Everett a tug, signaling him to dial back the jealousy.

It was too potent!

Despite his reluctance, Everett knew he had to keep up appearances for Dorothy's sake.

"Make yourselves comfortable." Once inside, Kenneth poured them some water and played the perfect host.

Everett glanced around.

The place wasn't large - a modest one-bedroom with simple decor. Toys were scattered everywhere, yet he got things tidy in general.

Kenneth waited for them to sit before he gathered up a large pile of Abigail and Langston's favorite toys.

"There are more, but I figured Mr. Lopez would probably buy new ones, so there's no need to take these."

"Mm-hmm." Everett grunted in acknowledgment, placing the paper bag on the table. "I want to thank you for all you've done for Dorothy and my kids over the years. This is for you."

Dorothy was surprised Everett had thought of this.

Kenneth glanced at the bag but didn't reach for it, instead just offering a smile, "What has Mr. Lopez brought me?"

"Take a look."

"Ah, the Lopez family's style shines through." Kenneth's smile didn't falter, though his true feelings were unclear.

He took the bag and looked inside.

There was a deed to a villa, keys to a luxury car, and a contract for transferring ownership of a medium-sized company.

What was in the bag could easily catapult someone to the upper echelons of Eldorria City's wealthy elite.

"Mr. Lopez, it seems you're offering these in good faith."

"I told you that I came to express my gratitude." Everett could sense the challenge but chose not to rise to it, not wanting to embarrass Dorothy.

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 592 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 592

Everett could sense the unease creeping into the woman beside him, a discomfort he never intended to foster.

Lost in his own surge of jealousy just moments ago, he had failed to consider the awkward position he had placed Dorothy in.

"It's not like I said anything, right?" Kenneth stuffed the brown paper bag back into the cupboard, then looked up at Everett with a level gaze. "I don't need your thanks, because my help was for Dorothy, not you. You have no reason to give me anything. It doesn't mean much to me."

If Kenneth had wanted money, he could've easily spent his time earning it, but he chose not to.

Not because he couldn't, but because he wanted to take some of the load off Dorothy's shoulders.

"Kenneth, Everett was just trying to..."

Kenneth cut her off with a smile, "Dorothy, I know. Seeing you two doing well actually makes me happy for you. It's been almost five years since I've seen such a smile on your face. But I hope you understand that bumping into Mr. Lopez doesn't exactly thrill me."

Who would be thrilled to see a love rival?

Dorothy bit her lips.

"Can I have a word with you in private?" Kenneth ignored Everett's presence, focusing solely on Dorothy.

"Uh?" Dorothy glanced unconsciously in Everett's direction.

Kenneth offered a reassuring smile, "It's about Byte 7. Mr. Lopez can relax; it's strictly business, nothing to do with love affairs."

"No worries here." Surprisingly, Everett let go of Dorothy's hand. "Go ahead, I'll wait for you."

Relieved, Dorothy exhaled deeply.

"Okay."

She followed Kenneth to what used to be Abigail's bedroom. Once the door was closed behind them, Kenneth got straight to the point.

"How much more do you need for Byte 7's final payment?"

Learning the issue was not that serious, she huffed, "Not much. I've got it covered on my own."

"I saw you selling off stocks and property, Dorothy. I bought them all."

Dorothy was taken aback, "What? Kenneth, you shouldn't have!"

"That's why you should just tell me how much you need. It's a loan, not a gift! Stop liquidating your assets. The Lopez family might notice you're gathering funds."

If they dug deeper and found out before the video surveillance was restored, and managed to bribe Byte 7 first, it would be a disaster.

After a long talk, Dorothy finally nodded in agreement.

But she set a condition: her assets would be transferred to Kenneth first. If she couldn't pay him back, they'd be his. It was a deal where he wouldn't lose out.

Kenneth understood her stubbornness so he didn't argue. Instead, he just nodded, "Alright, we'll do it your way."

"Then let's get going." She didn't want Everett to wait for such a long time.

As she moved to open the door, Kenneth suddenly stepped in front of her.

"What?"

He pursed his lips, "Will you still insist on the truth even if it means turning against Everett?"

"Of course. I'm this close to having evidence so I won't give up now."

"And do you love Everett?" he furrowed his thick brows and stared at her.

"...Nothing will stop me from bringing my mother's killer to justice! If his mother committed a crime, she must be held accountable!"

"I understand."

Kenneth released her and whispered reassuringly in her ear, "I'll help you with everything I've got."

"Kenneth..."

"When the truth is out, I promise you I'll find someone and settle down."

Dorothy's face stiffened; she knew no amount of persuasion would change his mind.

When Dorothy stepped out of the room, Everett immediately stood up, "Are we ready to leave?"

"Yeah." Dorothy nodded, walking over to join Everett.

As they reached the foyer of Kenneth's house, he called out to Dorothy.

"When you come back this time, visit your mom's grave."

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 593 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 593

Everett shot an instinctive look to Dorothy upon hearing the proposition.

Dorothy's petite face had gone a shade paler, a forced calm painted over her features while her lashes fluttered like the wings of a trapped butterfly. It took her several seconds to nod in agreement, "Okay, I'll go."

"If you don't want to go alone, I can come with you," Kenneth offered gently.

"No need. Bye, Kenneth."

Dorothy's steps became noticeably flustered. It was Everett's arm, wrapped supportively around her waist, that guided her into the car and away from the scene.

Kenneth watched the car grow smaller in the distance until it disappeared from view, a storm of guilt brewing inside him like a tempest.

He knew he shouldn't have brought up her mother at such a moment—that was her sore spot.

But the indignation within him was just too strong to suppress.

Why should Everett play the magnanimous benefactor and do charity to him? He called it compensation as if it wasn't a blatant insult!

Kenneth had tried to rise above the pettiness because he was deemed to be defeated. But he hadn't counted on Everett tailing Dorothy even for a simple errand!

Everett was always so cautious and always so attuned to Dorothy's feelings...

Kenneth couldn't believe Everett hadn't considered how his own presence would rankle him.

Since Everett had chosen this path, Kenneth wouldn't just sit back and take it. After all, for all of Everett's virtues, he was burdened with a mother who was nothing but trouble. He couldn't blame this on anyone.

And yet Kenneth's heart ached for Dorothy.

Torn between the harsh truth of her mother's death and her love for Everett, she must have wrestled with the choice more than anyone knew. She, who typically shied away from confrontation and bottled up her emotions, was now ready to leave her two children for a month to be by Everett's side—a testament to her deep love for him.

From Everett's bewildered gaze earlier, it was clear Dorothy hadn't shared even a whisper of her turmoil with him. She likely wanted to give their relationship one last month to indulge in their passion and set aside their grievances.

It was a rare decision for Dorothy, and Kenneth regretted bringing up her mother and reopening old wounds.

...

Inside the car, the silence was as thick as it had been on the way over, but now it was heavy with an unspoken tension.

Everett turned to look at Dorothy for the fifth time, and Dorothy finally caught his gaze.

"What's wrong?" he murmured softly.

She shook her head, "Nothing, just a bit tired, I guess."

It was a lie, a placation.

"Are you upset I gave Kenneth those things?"

"No," Dorothy forced a thin smile, "He's looked after your son for so long. You really should repay him, although it might have been a bit much."

Some gifts were a gesture of gratitude, but they could feel like an insult if they were too lavish.

"He's made sacrifices in his career for Langston. Joining Lopez Corporation is out of the question, and he wouldn't want to. So I gave him a company of his own."

As for the mansion and the sports car—weren't those just the normal tokens of appreciation?

That way, if Kenneth ever wanted to settle down, there would be no shortage of women keen to marry him. If he could get himself a wife no matter how old he got, then he wouldn't be fighting over someone else's wife.

"Don't force him to accept. Kenneth has his own way of thinking," Dorothy said, fearing the tension between them might escalate.

"Alright." Everett agreed without hesitation.

The car pulled up to Bay Residence.

Stepping out, Dorothy looked up at the building. Her heart was a tumult of emotions she couldn't quite name.

Everett wrapped his arms around her from behind and rested his chin on her shoulder. His lips were curving into a soft smile, "We're home again."

Chapter 594

"Yeah, back again."

She remembered the first time she set foot in this place, neck craning and heart thumping, all she could think was, "It is so nice to be rich!" Back then, she was even envious of someone who could catch Everett's eyes.

And now, it turned out she was envying herself.

Hand in hand with Everett, she entered the house, where Abigail and Langston were already in a wild play-fight and having toys scattered everywhere.

Dorothy's face went through a quick change of colors as she scolded, "You two, clean this mess up, now!"

Because Everett was bit of a neat freak.

She didn't even dare to glance at Everett, imagining just how sour his expression must be as he saw his own home being messed up like that.

Instinctively, Dorothy kicked off her shoes and hurried to join the cleanup.

But suddenly, her wrist was caught in a warm, firm grip.

Everett's voice came through from above, "Abigail, Langston, keep playing. It's fine."

Dorothy stared at him, baffled, "But this..."

"I like watching them play." There wasn't a hint of disgust in Everett's eyes, only a pure joy reaching all the way to his soul.

How wonderful that was.

That was what a home should feel like.

Dorothy was taken aback. She had a hunch that he was going to be one of those dads who spoiled their kids rotten.

No, it's not a hunch. It's already happening!

When she saw the toys and play forts Everett had prepared for the little rascals, she was all flabbergasted.

The Bay Residence was pretty spacious indeed. He would even try to fit a whole roller coaster in here if he could, right?

"Everett, you're really overdoing it," she says, pointing to the miniature carousel behind the play fort, "Langston won't even ride this. Only Abigail likes it."

There was no need to bring that home, surely!

They could just go to an amusement park!

Everett, however, didn't agree, "That space would be empty otherwise, and the equipment was a bargain."

Dorothy looked up at him and after a long pause, she could only remark, "Hmm, what isn't cheap in your eyes?"

"You."

Everett peppered kisses on her forehead, "I'd give everything I have, and it still wouldn't be enough to buy you."

Dorothy was still not quite used to his sudden bursts of romance, but a large part of the gloom from their visit to Kenneth's place had certainly been swept away.

"Mommy! There's so much candy here!" Abigail's excitement was unstoppable as she tugged at Dorothy.

Following her daughter into a pink room and going past the jungle of play fort toys, they came upon the princess room Everett had carefully arranged.

Everett had put his heart into this.

He'd even cleared out his own library space because this room was bigger.

Pink and white decorations were everywhere, and the princess bed was hand-carved with Abigail's name at the base.

"Everett, when did you have the bed commissioned?"

It clearly wasn't a last-minute job.

Everett, following her in, smiled and confessed, "Since the day I found out Abigail existed."

Dorothy was flabbergasted.

"Do you like it too?" he gestured toward the bed, "Then for our bedroom we could—"

"Let's not," Dorothy waved the idea away, "I can't picture you sleeping in a princess bed."

It would be hilariously out of place.

But Everett wrapped his arms around Dorothy and kissed her right away.

"As long as you're in the bed, any bed will do."

"Everett, the kids are right here!"

"Parents in love is good for the kids."

Abigail, munching on candy and blinking her big eyes, didn't quite grasp their conversation. Luckily, there's Langston, who rolled his eyes at their lovesick parents and pulled his sister away.

"Ignore them. Let's go play!"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 595 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 595

Today, Abigail and Langston, who were buzzing with excitement, played until the wee hours of the morning before finally hitting the hay.

Dorothy made sure the kids were sound asleep before retreating to her bedroom, indulging in a relaxing shower and slipping into her pajamas.

Everett had been glued to his work ever since dinner, his eyes now locked on the computer screen with an intensity that seemed to light up the room.

But Dorothy didn't feel neglected, not one bit. In fact, she adored Everett when he was in work mode!

With his gold-rimmed glasses perched on his nose, a slight furrow in his brow, he listened intently to the report from the person on the other end of the call.

Every now and then, he'd push up his glasses with the tip of his finger, exuding a no-nonsense vibe that made Dorothy itch to plant a kiss right on the bridge of his nose...

Dorothy naturally had her own world too.

Recent events had thrown a wrench into her projects, yet no one from the company had come knocking for updates. She didn't need a crystal ball to know why.

Kevin must have stepped in.

Effortlessly, she logged into the Lopez Corporation's software and was stunned to find her title had changed from assistant to director.

Even with East Star Enterprises merging into the Lopez Corporation, she couldn't fathom how she qualified for the director's chair.

Everett noticed her account go active and lifted his gaze to meet hers.

She blinked in surprise, "How'd you know I was online so fast?"

Her position, even as a director, didn't warrant a direct line to the CEO's account of the Lopez Corporation! Plus, he was in a meeting. So he surely couldn't monitor employee logins all the time, right?

Everett's lips curved into a slight smile as he swiveled his screen to show her.

A pop-up notification was on display, alerting Everett that the project director of the Lopez Corporation, Dorothy, was online.

There was actually a feature for that? She thought to herself.

He answered her silent question in a low voice as he could read her heart, "I had your son design it. It's just for you and me."

"Langston?"

"Mhm, he said he was bored, so I let him tinker with the Lopez Corporation's software backend."

Dorothy was taken aback; she hadn't expected Everett to let their son mess with the company's systems.

"He's still a kid! Don't let him cause you any trouble."

Everett didn't respond but shared a digital business card with Dorothy through the Lopez Corporation's software.

Opening it, she saw: Network Technology Consultant for the Lopez Corporation: Langston Sanchez.

"Have you lost your mind?"

"Langston passed the company's assessments, and human resources approved it," Everett said seriously. "However, we should probably change his last name."

"Even if he loves computers, you need to keep an eye on him. He's still too young, so don't let him accidentally cause a mess at the Lopez Corporation."

"Your son already did, no harm done." It had merely caused the Lopez Corporation's software to go offline for a couple of weeks.

Dorothy then had nothing to say.

Everett saved the final contract and sent it to Kevin, then stood up and walked over to Dorothy, gently patting her shoulder.

"Stop worrying about everything. You are always fretting over different things. I've got it under control."

He didn't want Dorothy to wear herself out.

Her little mind was carrying too much weight. If only she could let go a little, like others did, but Dorothy was different. She kept everything bottled up.

Just like now, Everett was painfully aware that Dorothy was hiding something big from him.

Something that not only threatened her but was also beyond his ability to fix because Dorothy hadn't even tried to ask for his help.

What on earth could it be?

Chapter 596

After a tiresome day, Karen headed straight to her bedroom to catch some z's. She wove through a tapestry of bizarre dreams, only to be jostled awake by the persistent knocking of her dad, Derek.

Bleary-eyed, her hand instinctively searched for her phone to check the time, but then it hit her that her phone was busted.

"Karen?" Derek's knocks continued, a steady rhythm against her door.

She quickly ran her fingers through her hair, "Coming, coming!"

Swinging the door open, she found Derek with a box in hand, "Karen, someone dropped this off for you. He said your phone got busted by accident, and this is the replacement."

Karen bit her lips. She knew in a heartbeat it was Jeffrey's doing. And what did he mean by "by accident"?

"Is it for you?" Derek asked. Sensing her silence, his voice was tinged with caution.

"Yeah, someone wrecked my phone and mentioned something about a replacement." She took the box without ceremony.

After all, it was indeed Jeffrey's fault, and he wasn't hurting for cash. But she was.

A new phone would set her back a few hundred bucks.

"That nearly gave me a heart attack. I thought it was some scam," Derek chuckled; he didn't give much thought about it.

Karen offered a few laughs in return before taking the new phone into her room.

For now, she could set up her WhatsApp and the likes.

Unboxing it, she found the latest, most expensive model from the Apple store.

But the film had already been peeled off.

"A second-hand phone?!"

Her brows knitted in displeasure, but upon booting it up, she realized it was new—her card had already been installed.

Had Jeffrey taken her smashed phone with him when he left? That was the only way her card could have ended up with him.

Too flabbergasted at the time, Karen hadn't noticed.

She powered on the device, logged into her ID, and began downloading her go-to apps. Before she could even get WhatsApp running, the phone rang.

With her contacts yet to be transferred, the caller was unknown.

"Hello?" Karen answered. Her tone was less than enthused, bracing for Jeffrey.

"Is this Miss Karen?" The voice on the other end was tentative. It wasn't Jeffrey.

"Yes, speaking. Who's this?"

"Levi, I'm... uh... the friend your parents introduced you to."

Karen didn't reply at once.

Levi was her blind date.

In the throes of her spat with Jeffrey, she'd completely overlooked getting in touch with Levi all day.

"I sent you a message on WhatsApp today, and when you didn't reply, I thought I'd try giving you a call. Didn't expect you'd pick up."

It made Karen seem like she was avoiding him!

She rushed to clarify, "It's not that I didn't get back to you. My phone got trashed, and I haven't logged onto WhatsApp yet. I just started up this new phone, and your call came through."

"Oh!" Levi chuckled on the other end, "So your phone got wrecked. How did that happen?"

"An unfortunate accident."

Levi seemed the type not quite adept at small talk. He got a hint of awkwardness in his voice and was unsure of where to steer the conversation.

Karen took the lead once more, "What are you up to?"

"Just finished sorting out some paperwork for the office. Now... I'm waiting for your reply on WhatsApp."

After his confession, Levi let out a sheepish chuckle.

His innocence made Karen laugh, "What if I never replied or answered the call? You'd just keep waiting?"

"Well... my work's done for the day, and there's nothing else planned."

"Are you hungry?" Karen fiddled with the packaging of her new phone with her fingernail.

"Uh?" Levi felt confused.

"I'm starved. How about treating me to dinner? What do you say?"

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 597 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 597

Silence hung on the line for an eternity from Levi's end.

Just as Karen was about to speak up, a clatter echoed through the receiver like a tumbler taking a dive.

"Wait, wait, just give me a sec. I've got to wipe down the table!"

Karen gasped.

Moments later, Levi panted back into the conversation, "So, what are you in the mood for? I'll swing by and pick you up!"

Karen couldn't help but chuckle, "Here I thought you didn't want to treat me. "

"No, it's not that! I just... I didn't expect you to bring this up..."

Truth be told, he'd been on the verge of asking her out multiple times. But each time, the words just wouldn't come out.

If Karen hadn't brought it up, he'd probably still be hemming and hawing.

"Levi, you better brace yourself. I'm not exactly a knockout," Karen quipped. Their last attempt at a blind date fell through, and Levi had been swamped at work since then. They'd connected on WhatsApp, sure, but never broached the subject of meeting up.

Today would be the first time they'd see each other face to face.

Karen wasn't keen on rushing things, but with her life thrown into disarray by Jeffrey's meddling, she felt it was high time to get back on track—for her peace of mind and her parents' sake.

Derek had that worried look when he dropped off her phone; clear as day, he feared she might reach out to Jeffrey again. Although her folks probably didn't know the gritty details, Jeffrey's confrontational visit was telling enough, no need to spell it out.

"You're beautiful. I've seen your photos."

"I touched them up," Karen retorted.

Nowadays, what girl doesn't edit her pics?

"They're still pretty," Levi replied with a goofy grin. "Decided what you want to eat yet?"

Karen rubbed her stomach, aware of her hunger but clueless about her cravings.

"Just pick me up first. We'll figure it out then."

"Alright!"

After the call, Karen logged into her phone and WhatsApp, only to find a barrage of messages from Levi.

[Good afternoon, heading to a sushi spot by the office. You into Japanese food?]

[Lunch was meh, won't take you there if I'm treating.]

[Got a few meetings this afternoon. If I don't reply, don't be mad. I'll get back to you ASAP!]

He'd been rambling on by himself, and Karen hadn't noticed a thing.

Scrolling through her messages, she spotted an unread one, marked by a little red dot.

A stranger had added her.

The profile picture was of Crayon Shin-chan sticking his tongue out, and the contact was named with a single letter, J.

No need to guess who that was.

Other than Jeffrey, who else would it be?

Without a second thought, Karen deleted him.

Their last exchange had been clear enough; there was nothing left to discuss.

By the time Levi arrived, night had enveloped the city.

After freshening up, Karen threw on a simple white tee and stepped outside.

Descending the stairs, her eyes immediately locked onto a sleek black Audi—impossibly conspicuous.

She took a sharp breath, relieved to see that the man emerging wasn't Jeffrey.

"Over here!" Levi, all dapper in a tailored suit, waved at her. Next to him, Karen's casual tee and jeans combo, topped with a sporty hoodie, felt positively laid-back.

Approaching him, she offered a smile, "Been waiting long?"

"Just got here." Levi was visibly anxious as he fished out a bouquet of roses from the back seat. "These... are for you."

Karen was taken aback by the unexpected gesture and was momentarily speechless.

"I'm not much of an expert on what girls like, but my coworker said roses are a safe bet. So I bought some." Levi admitted.

She could even see the deep shade of crimson on his face if not for the dim streetlights.

The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires #Chapter 598 - Read The CEO's Hidden Love Midnight Temptations and Deep Desires Chapter 598

Karen clutched the bouquet of roses as she slid into the passenger seat of Levi's truck.

"Decided what you're in the mood for?" Levi asked as he buckled up and revved the engine alive.

Karen pondered for a moment, "How about a steakhouse?"

"Perfect! There's this place on Rising River Avenue; that's all the rage in Eldorria City. The steaks are to die for. I'll take you there," Levi said as he raised his eyebrows playfully; his eyes were sparkling with a boyish charm.

His words and slightly awkward mannerisms had given Karen a hint.

She met his gaze, hesitated, and then ventured, "If you don't mind me asking... have you, um, never been in a relationship before?"

Levi seemed caught off guard by the question. He instinctively ran a hand through his hair, "Well, there was this one time in high school, but it ended pretty quick with a call to my parents."

"That's it?"

"Yeah. I was always buried in my studies, and once I started working, there was just never enough time to think about dating."

Karen believed him. His bashful expression wasn't something he could fake, but the more innocent he seemed, the guiltier she felt.

He was so pure, and she...

"Ahem... I think we should be upfront with each other," she finally said.

"Sure, shoot," Levi replied, earnestly turning on the dome light and parking the truck by the roadside to give her his full attention.

Karen moistened her lips with her tongue, took a breath, and said, "I'm not new to this. I've been in relationships before."

Levi nodded, "Then?"

"I mean I've done some really wild things in the past."

She wanted to be honest, to lay her cards on the table so they both had a chance to choose, rather than having it come out later and deal with whether or not it mattered to him.

Levi took a moment to grasp her meaning. Under the dome light, Karen could see the blush on his cheeks spreading, his ears turning a shade of crimson.

He hadn't expected such frankness and that she broached this topic so directly.

"I... I don't mind," he finally managed to say. "That's your past."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Everyone has a past, but it's the future that's important."

His innocence made Karen feel as though she was corrupting a young boy. She quickly switched off the dome light to hide her discomfort, "Let's get going. I'm starved."

"Alright!"

Levi was genuinely a good guy as she spent more time with him. He was naive and confused, while he had a way of making thoughtful gestures that warmed Karen's heart.

Throughout the meal, he would wipe their utensils clean, place them before her, and prepare a stack of napkins and a dish for the peppers.

Learning that he was inexperienced had initially made Karen consider calling it quits, for she didn't want to lead on such a decent person. But as the meal progressed, she decided to give it another chance.

He'd said he didn't mind, so any further fuss on her part would be pointless.

As they were finishing up, Levi excused himself to the restroom—Karen knew he was going to settle the bill discreetly. She pulled out a compact mirror to touch up her lipstick and caught a glimpse of a familiar figure reflected within.

Jeffrey!

That persistent ghost from her past.

Karen snapped the mirror shut and glanced over her shoulder, relieved to see that Jeffrey hadn't noticed her and was busy with his own company.

She remembered suddenly when Levi had mentioned that this steakhouse was a hit among the affluent in Eldorria City.

Go figure she'd run into Jeffrey of all people!

Before Levi returned, she'd already gathered her things and slipped away from their table.

She figured she'd wait for Levi at the front door, out of Jeffrey's line of sight.

After settling the bill and actually washing his hands, Levi returned to an empty seat.

He scanned the room and saw no signs of Karen. Panic set in.

Did she leave because he took too long paying? Was she angry?

He whipped out his phone and dialed her number.

She picked up quickly.

"Karen, where are you?"

"I'm at the front, just needed some fresh air. Come find me."

"Okay."

Levi found it odd that she wanted to leave before finishing their meal, but didn't dwell on it. He ended the call, grabbed his coat, and followed suit.

Unbeknownst to him, the very mention of "Karen" had pricked Jeffrey's ears!

"There." Karen waved at Levi as she saw him approach.

He jingled his car key and walked over, "Not feeling well? Should we see a doctor?"

"It's not that dramatic. Just felt a bit stuffy in there, probably because of the poor ventilation." Karen chuckled as she tugged at the sleeve of Levi's jacket, "Let's just go."

"Sure!"

As Karen's intimate gesture made Levi blush, they headed for the car.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, Karen glanced at the front of the steakhouse gate. And she saw Jeffrey stand right there.

He stood there, arms crossed, decked out in black jeans and a matching bomber jacket. Leaning against the entrance, he was fixing his eyes on her.

This was bad.

When had Jeffrey noticed her?

Karen's face turned ashen in a sec, and her pace quickened.

Levi, sensing something amiss, offered support, "You look pale. Maybe we should just go to the hospital?"

"No need, let's just go fast."

Karen pretended not to see Jeffrey and got into the car. As she reached to close the door, a large hand suddenly appeared and made a firm grasp.

Looking up, she met Jeffrey's narrowed eyes.

"Why the rush? Can't you even say hello when you see an old friend?"

Karen pouted.

Levi glanced at him, then at Karen, "A friend of yours?"

"Uh, yeah! A friend. Just hang on a sec, I'll have a quick word with him and then we can leave." Karen forced a stiff smile at Levi, then quickly stepped out and shut the door.

She didn't speak to Jeffrey right away, instead walking a bit away before speaking.

"Fancy seeing you here, Mr. Turner. You're into steak too?" Karen's smile looked more like a grimace.

Jeffrey slid his hands into his jacket pockets, pulled out a cigarette, and lit it with a flick of his lighter.

"Did you get the new phone?"

"Yeah, got it. Thanks for the replacement."

"And who's that?" Jeffrey nodded toward the black Audi.

He wasn't clueless. He had a hunch but wanted to ask anyway.

Karen thought, why act all guilty like she'd been caught cheating? So she replied candidly, "He's someone I was set up with. Scratch that, guess he's my boyfriend now."

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"Boyfriend?"

Jeffrey's echo of her words seemed to roll off his tongue with a mix of amusement and disbelief before he let out a contemptuous chuckle. "Do you ever listen to a word I say?" he quipped.

"What are you talking about?" Karen blurted out.

He always talked so much nonsense, so how was she supposed to remember it all?

"Another round, huh? Now that you've got yourself a boyfriend, is that still on the table?" Jeffrey's words were deliberate. His eyebrows also arched mockingly as he talked.

"Of course it's not on the table! I thought I made myself crystal clear back at the diner, Jeffrey. If you don't have the guts to put a ring on it, you can forget about another night in my bed!"

She despised how Jeffrey always reduced everything to just that one thing.

Without a word, Jeffrey crushed his cigarette under his shoe, his gaze fixed on the ground.

"I've got assets that can't be transferred, plus a few properties my folks left in my name. How about I give you half of what's left? How's that sound?" He looked up at her, his face intermittently illuminated by the neon glow of the diner's sign, casting shadows across his expression.

Karen couldn't help but laugh.

"Mr. Turner, are we haggling now?"

"Even half would ensure you live comfortably in Eldorria City for the rest of your life."

She had no doubt about that, but the truth was, she didn't want it.

"Listen to me, Jeffrey. I said all of it," she repeated firmly, "And that's only if you cross any of the lines we set. I saw you hesitate when I asked – that tells me I'm not irreplaceable to you. It's clear as day I'm not after your money. I just wanted to see where you stood. And you failed the test. Can't we just go our separate ways?"

"I can't. What about him?" Jeffrey scoffed coldly. "By the looks of his car and the way he carries himself, he's probably got nothing but a beat-up ride and a mortgage to his name. Even if he gave you everything, it wouldn't come close to a tenth of what I have!"

Karen felt the sting of insult, her brows knitting together in frustration.

"You think this is some kind of auction that the highest bidder wins? Let me tell you something, Jeffrey. Your money doesn't impress me. Here's some friendly advice: let's act like strangers in Eldorria City. If we bump into each other, don't bother saying hello. I don't know you. And if you keep pestering me, bringing up one more time, two more times, I swear I'll tell Everett everything!"

The silence that followed was telling that she had hit his only sore spot.

With that, Karen spun on her heel to leave.

Jeffrey was quick, though, with long legs that closed the distance in no time, his hand latching onto her wrist.

Karen struggled, and Levi, who had been waiting in the car, caught sight of the commotion.

He burst from the vehicle with a protective roar, "What the hell are you doing? Let go of Karen!"

A sinking feeling hit Karen – why hadn't she told Levi to leave earlier? She knew Jeffrey wouldn't hurt her, but Levi was another story.

"Don't come over here, I'm fine!" She tried to signal to Levi to stay out of it.

But Jeffrey, with a look of fury in his eyes, was already advancing on Levi.

Before he could get another word out, Jeffrey's fist had connected with Levi's face and sent him crashing to the ground. His head hit the car door and let out a thud.

"Jeffrey, have you lost your damn mind?!"

Karen rushed over, shoving Jeffrey away to help Levi up.

With his bookish demeanor, Levi stood no chance against Jeffrey.

As she looked up, blood was already streaming from his nose.

But Jeffrey wasn't done. He yanked Karen back and his voice was thick with rage, "No one dares to mess with my girl in Eldorria City!"