

## Midnight 671

### Chapter 671

Her gaze flickered with a tremor as his eyes burned with an intensity and sincerity that was almost too much to bear.

"Everett."

"I'm here."

"Your mother..."

"Don't worry about her," Everett interjected with a soothing voice, "My mom and dad have always been put on a pedestal. They can't stand anyone singing out of tune with them. Whatever they do or say, you don't need to think twice about it! As their son, I can't control their thoughts, but I know exactly what I want, and they certainly can't control me either."

He treated what he didn't want to hear like water off a duck's back.

He could not silence them, but he could cover his ears.

Dorothy's lips parted slightly, but she could not bring herself to voice the remaining thoughts.

She looked down and offered a wry smile, saying, "Everett, is this your first act of rebellion? No wonder your parents are taken aback."

"Not really." Everett's arms firmly encircled her slender waist as he exhaled deeply. "My mom had some rough times before and ended up with severe mental health issues on top of a heart condition. So, over the years, our communication has been simple—if I agree with them, I listen; if I don't, I won't argue, but I won't follow through either."

"Your parents do love you deeply."

"Yeah." Everett had to admit that much.

As the only son of the Lopez family, he was the apple of their eye.

Dorothy's grip loosened a bit, but Everett immediately tightened his hold.

"Don't be afraid, Dorothy. You're the only Mrs. Lopez I approve of."

She looked up, meeting Everett's gaze.

The exact words, again.

"Let's talk about the future when it comes, shall we?"

"Dorothy!"

There was a hint of urgency in Everett's voice.

Dorothy knew he was on the verge of anger, so she hastily wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her lips to his.

"But for now, I'm all yours."

With her making the first move, it was certain she would not escape his affection.

Dorothy realized that Everett could be negotiated with on any matter except this one—where his tenderness vanished, and restraint was nowhere to be found!

By the end, if Dorothy had any strength left, he would make sure to drain it completely.

It was as though only in this way he could stake his claim over her to reassure himself that he still had a path to her heart.

...

Kevin was always quick on his feet. The moment he received the order, he dispatched people to escort Heather.

Everett had Heather initially sent back to the country to prevent mishaps, then secretly relocated to Swevia Country.

This way, even if Amanda caught wind of it halfway, she would have to turn the country upside down looking for Heather.

"Where the hell are you taking me? I won't go!"

Heather was now worn to the bone; her voice never recovered after being hoarse from shouting, and she looked frail compared to the well-dressed Heather of the past.

But in this place, no one pampered her. The guard gave her a cold glance and said, "You don't have a say; just shut up."

"This is illegal! Holding me captive is a crime, and now you're smuggling me?"

Despite being blindfolded earlier, Heather felt certain she had been put on a plane!

"Ha! Talking about the law in the hands of the Lopez family?"

The men laughed dismissively, paying her no heed.

Heather panicked.

She knew Amanda could save her life, even after what she did to her son. Their last encounter made Heather believe that Amanda still had a soft spot for her! But if she left Amanda's sphere of influence, it was a different story.

If Dorothy convinced Everett to get rid of her, it was certainly within the realm of possibility.

## Chapter 672

Heather had no idea what the outside world looked like now. The more she did not know, the more her panic spiraled. She felt utterly powerless, unable to do anything.

During the flight, there was a rough patch that had Heather, who was blindfolded, convinced they were about to throw her out of the plane.

"I need to see Everett. I have something urgent to discuss with him!"

It was her last card to play. If she did not, who knew if she would even make it off this plane alive?

But Heather's plea did not seem to catch anyone's attention.

The flight attendants, acting as her escorts, thought she had lost her marbles.

The Lopez family's golden boy, Everett? He was not someone one could just summon. They had no clue who to contact, even if they wanted to convey her message.

"You tell Everett I have information about Dorothy! And I need to tell him face to face!"

Heather always knew how to play her cards right.

Just shouting for Everett would not bring him to her, but if it was about Dorothy, she was sure it would get his attention.

...

Dorothy was oblivious to Heather's predicament.

Her mind was occupied with Byte 7, hoping to secure the restored flash drive before Everett caught wind of the truth.

If the Lopez family had intercepted her before that, all her efforts would have been for naught.

Taking advantage of Everett being tied up with corporate affairs, Dorothy snuck to a secluded bench behind the hospital to call Byte 7.

She did not have much hope he would answer; the guy was an enigma with a notoriously quirky personality.

To her surprise, after just two rings, he picked up.

"What's up?"

His voice was as indifferent and impatient as usual, clearly recognizing the caller.

Dorothy did not beat around the bush. "How's the flash drive recovery going? You said a month..."

"Almost done." Byte 7 was terse, answering her question before adding, "Have you prepared the rest of the payment?"

"Yeah." Dorothy gripped her phone, constantly scanning her surroundings in case Everett showed up. "You send me the video of the flash drive recovery, and I'll transfer the money to you."

Byte 7 chuckled softly on the other end.

"Are you sure you don't want to be my girlfriend for a week?"

"I have the final payment ready."

"Just a week, seven days." Byte 7 did not care for her response, sticking to his script. "I won't do anything to you."

Dorothy frowned.

The last thing she wanted to do was negotiate terms of affection with Byte 7.

"Our initial deal was that if I could not pay, I'd agree to be your girlfriend for a week. But now, I have the money!"

"So typical of Everett's girl, looking down on me, right?"

Speechless, Dorothy wanted to lash out, but she could not afford to antagonize Byte 7 at this moment. "I just hope you'll honor the spirit of our agreement."

Byte 7 laughed again, his voice deepening, losing the carefree tone of youth. "I've already checked your account; I know you've gathered the final payment."

"Then why ask?"

"If I can get into your account, I can freeze or transfer that money, preventing you from making the payment."

Dorothy's hand clenched into a fist. "What do you really want?"

"I want to date you."

Chapter 673

"I don't!"

Dorothy had reached her breaking point.

He was clearly trying to exploit the situation!

"So, do you think I'm not as handsome as Everett, not as wealthy?" The abrupt change in his demeanor threw her off.

"Um... shouldn't we be avoiding this topic? Byte 7, I asked for your help to retrieve data from my flash drive. This is a transaction between us. I don't want to drag personal matters into it."

Byte 7 seemed to straighten up a bit, his voice regaining some of its usual tone.

"I've recovered most of the footage on the flash drive, but let me tell you straight. If you think you can use this to take down the Lopez Corporation, you're dreaming."

"That's my concern to handle."

"But if I decide to help you, that changes everything." Byte 7's words came out slowly, deliberately, "This footage is just part of the story. The data on the flash drive isn't comprehensive. If I'm not mistaken, there should be other flash drives out there, which you haven't gotten your hands on, right?"

"They've all been destroyed. This is my last hope."

Dorothy's eyes dimmed with despair.

She had not seen the footage from the drive yet, so she had no idea if it was enough to turn the tables and win her case!

"Destroyed doesn't mean it can't be recovered."

Dorothy's heart skipped a beat. "What do you mean? Even without the original, it's possible?"

"Once surveillance footage like this is recorded, it leaves traces online. I took your flash drive, found the code for that camera, hacked into the company that manages the surveillance, and accessed their core database. They're at my mercy now."

Dorothy stood up so fast her chair nearly toppled over!

"So, you got all the footage?"

"Mhm." Byte 7 chuckled, "So, do you want to date me now?"

"No."

"Then you don't want to see the full footage?"

Byte 7 was clearly laying a trap, just waiting for Dorothy to take the bait. This was not a choice; it was coercion.

But he did not understand Dorothy.

Too much pressure, and she would never cave.

"If you don't want to give it to me, then fine. I'll just take what's on my drive."

"Stubborn, aren't you?" Byte 7 was taken aback by her refusal.

He just could not grasp it.

Mostly because he never believed in undying love!

"I hope you'll send me the videos from the drive when the time comes. I'll give you the final payment, and we'll be even."

As soon as Dorothy finished her sentence, her phone pinged with a notification from her bank.

In a second, her account was drained.

Not even a penny remained.

"See? I'm not joking around."

Dorothy pressed her lips and took a deep breath, "Well, it's all yours now. You've saved me the trouble of transferring it."

"Dorothy! My patience is wearing thin!" Byte 7 was on the edge of madness. "All I'm asking is for you to date me for a week. What's the big deal?"

"Then tell me, why are you so insistent on dating me for a week?"

Dorothy did not believe it was due to her charm.

There was a significant age gap between her and Byte 7, and standing together, it was pretty noticeable. Surely, Byte 7 did not have some sort of Oedipus complex?

After a few grunts on the other end of the line, Byte 7 laughed. "Because I want to legitimately play the role of Langston's dad for a few days!"

Langston?

Dorothy was stunned. "How did you..."

"Your son's skills, I taught him everything he knows, so don't be surprised."

Chapter 674

Hearing the tone of Byte 7's voice, it seemed that he'd known Langston was her son for a while.

So seeing Langston's face, Byte 7 must have recognized the kid had Everett's genes too. And yet, here he was, pretending to be clueless about why Langston was at Bay Residence.

"Your excuse is pretty childish," Though it sounded exactly like something Byte 7 would pull.

The guy was impulsive, did whatever he wanted, as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"There's another reason, too."

"What is it?"

"You're beautiful."

Dorothy thought he was a complete nutcase and definitely not in his right mind.

"I'm working on enhancing the video quality for you. Take a few more days to think it over and let me know," Byte 7 said, before suddenly changing the subject. "And by the way, Everett reached out to me. He didn't tell you, did he?"

Dorothy's heart sank. "What did he want?"

"Just checking in to see what kind of content I'm recovering from your USB for you."

"And you—"

"Don't worry, I'm a professional. I don't kiss and tell."

Dorothy rolled her eyes.

If Byte 7 had professional integrity, then no one else in the world could be a scoundrel.

After hanging up, Dorothy didn't rush back. Instead; she just sat on the park bench.

According to Byte 7, the video would be fully restored in a few days. Dorothy's final days with Everett were coming to an end.

It was laughably ironic.

Everett was busy planning their future, while Dorothy was gathering evidence to send his mother to jail. Talk about a plot twist.

Sometimes, in front of him, Dorothy felt like a traitor.

Facing his intense affection, all Dorothy could offer were empty gestures and lies.

Dorothy wished he would just stop loving her, maybe even hate her. It would be better than continuing to pour his heart and soul into a lie.

"Ms. Sanchez?"

Quincy appeared out of nowhere, standing in front of Dorothy.

Dorothy looked up, startled. "Dr. Quincy."

"What are you doing sitting here all by yourself? Please don't tell me you and Mr. Lopez had a falling out?" Quincy was rooting for their marriage, unable to stomach the idea of them fighting.

"No, just needed some fresh air. Everett's busy working; I didn't want to disturb him."

Quincy paused before sitting down at the other end of the bench.

"Ms. Sanchez, I'm planning to leave Swevia Country in a few days."

"Why?"

"Mr. Lopez wants to avoid suspicion, and he has already replaced the lead physician. There's not much point in me staying here. I might as well go back to my hospital and my patients—that's where I belong." Quincy smiled. "I hope to hear wedding bells for you two soon."

That would mean she could stop hiding.

Her parents' calls were blowing up her phone, and she had resorted to not answering.

As Quincy stood to leave, Dorothy's lips moved but no sound came out. It wasn't until she was almost gone that Dorothy finally spoke up. "Dr. Quincy, Everett and I, we're not getting married."

Quincy stiffened. "Why?"

"I might be leaving Swevia Country even sooner than you."

"I knew it. You and Mr. Lopez had a fight." Quincy sat back down. "He's so in love with you, Ms. Sanchez. If I may speak frankly as an outsider, you should be grateful."

All of Everett's moves were real. That kind of love couldn't be feigned.

Quincy believed Dorothy shouldn't be fighting with Everett. Having a man like him behind her was more than most women could even dream of.

"Dr. Quincy," Dorothy said, "would you marry into a family where the mother-in-law is the murderer of your own mother?"

Chapter 675

Quincy stood frozen in place for several minutes before she finally found her voice.

"You mean..."

"I can only stay with him in Swevia Country for a month, and time's almost up."

Quincy still couldn't wrap her head around this sudden news.

"Could there be some kind of mistake?"

"I wish there was." Dorothy stood up, offering Quincy a wistful smile, "His folks are really hoping you'll marry him. Honestly, if you could make Everett fall for you, I'd want you two to be together."

At least Quincy wasn't like Heather, always scheming and with an ulterior motive.

Quincy was kind, innocent, with a positive attitude and a strong moral compass. More importantly, the Lopez family was open to acknowledging her.

"You want to entrust him to me?"

"That's if Everett can accept you."

The rest was up to Quincy's capabilities.

"He can't." Quincy could give Dorothy that answer right away, "Ms. Sanchez, when Mr. Lopez was hanging by a thread, he was only calling out your name. You could say that if it wasn't for you, he might not have made it through the surgery. That kind of love, I don't have the guts to challenge, nor do I think I can replace."

Even though Everett embodied every fantasy Quincy had of love, his devotion to Dorothy made her step back.

After all, Quincy would only be a stand-in if she married him.

Maybe not even a stand-in, Quincy felt like Everett wouldn't even notice her.

After pouring out her heart, Quincy walked away with determined strides.

Leaving Dorothy alone on the chair, her eyes gradually reddening until she covered her face and began to sob softly.

...

Everett realized Dorothy was gone rather quickly.

He had just disconnected from a video conference when he immediately called her.

No answer.

A wave of panic hit him, and without even taking the time to put on a coat, he bolted out of the ward room.

She hadn't left, had she?

He had already told Dorothy that he would find a way to get the evidence they needed, that she didn't need to worry.

Not finding Dorothy anywhere in the hospital building, Everett tried calling again, only to be greeted once more by her voicemail.

A sudden pain clutched his chest, and he instinctively covered his heart.

Just as he was about to call security to track her down, Everett finally saw Dorothy walking in through the front door, head hung low.

Dorothy felt his gaze and instinctively looked up to meet his eyes.

"Everett—"

She didn't even get to finish his name before he pulled her fiercely into his embrace.

Because of their height difference, Dorothy could only lean against his chest, listening to his heart pounding furiously.

He was scared.

It was a palpable panic.

"Everett, I didn't leave."

"Shut up."

That was the harshest tone he had ever used with Dorothy.

All she could do was wait for his heartbeat to slow down a bit before wrapping her arms around him.

"I promise you, if I were to leave, I'd tell you, okay?"



Just so Everett wouldn't have to live in constant fear.

Seeing panic on the usually cool and arrogant Everett's face was rare, but lately, it was becoming a more common sight.

Whether Dorothy was in the hospital room, the bathroom, or just sitting on the couch opening her laptop to check some documents, his gaze would always follow her intently.

"You're leaving?" Everett caught the implication in her words.

"No, I mean, if..."

"There are no ifs." Everett cut her off sharply, "Dorothy, you might as well take my life, I'd give it to you."

Chapter 676

Everett suddenly slumped, his entire frame leaning on Dorothy's shoulder, his six-foot-three stature making it hard for her to breathe.

He was silent, simply resting against her.

Dorothy tried to speak several times but held back, deciding to let him catch his breath first.

Then, abruptly, she felt a dampness on her neck. The tears trailed down her collarbone, slowly slipping away.

Everett was crying, soundlessly.

The last time he cried, he blamed it on the whiskey, but this time, he was sober.

"Everett."

"Dorothy, you can't keep leaving me," his voice was hoarse, his chest trembled with each word, "Once is enough."

He couldn't bear it happening again.

...

Karen had landed a job.

She was working remotely as an event planner, no need to clock in at an office; she could work from home.

Even though Jeffrey suggested countless times that she should drop the idea of working and just enjoy being taken care of, Karen didn't want to be anyone's appendage.

"One grand a month for your salary?"

"There's benefits too, you know, health, dental, and retirement plans. It all adds up to more than two grand." Karen was quite content.

Jeffrey smirked and slumped back into the couch, "If you ask me, you should just come work at Lopez Corporation as my secretary. We could even... you know, during lunch breaks."

"Don't you think about anything else?"

Karen leaned back into the couch and gave him a playful kick.

Jeffrey wasn't bothered; he caught her ankle and pulled her towards him, "When I look at you, that is the only thing I can think of."

"Why don't you go find some other women? You've got too much energy; I can't handle it alone."

"Nope, I only want you."

Seeing him gearing up for more, Karen quickly put up her hand to block him.

"I just called my folks, and I told them I got a job. They want me to come over for dinner tonight. So cut it out."

Every time she tangled with him, she was left without any energy, certainly not enough to visit her parents.

As soon as Jeffrey heard she was leaving, he quickly cozied up, "I'm free tonight. I'll come with you to see the folks."

"Those are my parents."

"Sooner or later I'll have to call them mine, right? Might as well get familiar now." Jeffrey got up and started calling his secretary to order gifts to bring along.

Every time he visited Karen's parents, he'd come bearing armfuls of presents.

You can't fault someone for being too generous.

"I haven't agreed to go with you yet."

"If you don't agree, then you're not going anywhere either."

Jeffrey had become a pro at handling her.

In the evening, they drove to her parents' place together.

Derek was just returning from the market, hands full of groceries. When he got home, he immediately spotted Jeffrey's flashy car—a sight no one could miss.

"Dad, I've got this." Jeffrey jumped out of the car, not even bothering to lock it, and rushed over to help Derek with the bags.

His calling Derek 'Dad' with such warmth and eagerness almost put Karen to shame.

Derek was clearly delighted. His son-in-law might not have impressed him at first, but he had grown on him.

"Your mom's upstairs getting ready to make some pies. We didn't expect you'd be back so soon."

"We had nothing going on, so we thought we'd come early and spend some time with you guys." Jeffrey, holding the groceries, stood next to Karen with a goofy grin.

Karen rolled her eyes. Just as she was about to say something, she caught a glimpse of a familiar figure.

It was Jeffrey's ex-girlfriend. Her appearance was quite a surprise.

Jeffrey noticed the shift in the atmosphere and followed Karen's gaze.

He froze.

"Jeffrey, how long are you going to hide from me?"

Chapter 677

"Holy smokes."

Jeffrey had to stifle the curse before it slipped past his lips.

Well, Derek was still there now. His desperate gaze flicked to Karen.

Karen reached over, taking the grocery bags from Jeffrey's hand, and said to Derek, "Dad, Jeffrey's got a call from work. Let's head upstairs."

"Well, sure," Derek wasn't born yesterday, but if his daughter didn't make a fuss, neither would he. He followed her up the stairs.

Only when they were out of earshot did Jeffrey turn his glare on Paige.

"Are you nuts? I've been avoiding you like the plague, isn't that clear enough?"

He had never met such a clingy ex. To think she'd actually show up outside Karen's parents' place.

"I tried reaching out through friends, but you wouldn't answer. I had no choice but to look up that woman you're with." Paige's voice wavered, unable to say 'fiancée', her vision blurring with tears.

"Jeffrey, you said you'd never marry. You lied to me."

He ran his fingers through his hair in frustration, grabbed a pack from his car, and tapped out a cigarette. "Met someone who changed my mind. What, I need your approval now?"

"When you broke up with me, wasn't it because I wanted to get married and you didn't? All this time, I convinced myself that we split because we were different. You were a bachelor for life. I told myself to let go, to stop thinking about you, and then you turn around and propose to her?"

Jeffrey wasn't interested in her roundabout complaints. He focused on his smoke, and when she finally stopped talking, he said nonchalantly, "Yeah, I'm marrying her."

"And what about me?"

"An ex, what else?"

"Jeffrey! Are you blind? Am I not prettier, don't I have a better figure? Look at the dump her parents live in. She's not even in the same league as the Turners. She doesn't deserve you."

"Shut your trap," Jeffrey's already irritated gaze turned to disgust. He stepped up to Paige, towering over her, "Even if Karen is not the best, it's still none of your business. And as far as I'm concerned, she's better than you in every way."

"I've been polite because you're my friend's cousin. Don't push it." Jeffrey straightened his black bomber jacket, leaning against his car, and finished his last drag, stamping out the butt. "Get lost before my woman gets the wrong idea. If your drama causes us trouble, I am gonna give you a piece of my mind."

He started to walk away, but Paige ran after him, blocking his path.

"Then go ahead, because I can't stand to watch you marry someone else."

Jeffrey raised an eyebrow, his eyes darkening, "Paige, I'm no gentleman. I don't have a code against hitting women."

"Ha. Then kill me. It's better than watching you marry another woman."

"I'll be damned—"

"Jeffrey, that last time in the hotel, you didn't use protection."

He stopped mid-sentence.

Paige forced a smile, "You were in such a hurry, and even though I reminded you, you didn't listen. So a month later, I found out I was pregnant."

"But that's... that was two years ago."

"Right, so—"

Paige didn't finish her sentence, and Jeffrey clenched his jaw, realization dawning.

"Damn it! You had the kid?!"

Chapter 678

"Hmm."

The news hit Jeffrey like a ton of bricks - he was completely gobsmacked.

Paige was still murmuring, her voice barely above a whisper, "Back then you said you didn't want to get hitched and you'd never want kids, so I didn't dare tell you. I was scared you'd drag me to get an abortion. This is your child; I can't bear to part with it."

"Hold up, just wait a sec." Jeffrey's eyes darted upstairs before he grabbed Paige, practically shoving her into his car. "Let's not talk about this here."

He floored the accelerator, zooming away before he could even glance at his phone.

Upstairs, Karen had been glued to her window, watching the scene unfold below.

To say she didn't care would be a lie.

At first, she expected Jeffrey's words to be harsh - the guy was notorious for never sugarcoating anything, and his reputation as a scoundrel was well-deserved. The girl's face was getting paler by the second, tears starting to cascade down her cheeks.

As a woman, Karen's heart went out to Paige. She considered calling Jeffrey to tell him not to be too harsh and to break it off gently. But just as she got through, she saw Jeffrey yanking Paige by the arm and pulling her into his car before speeding off.

Where on earth was he taking her?

Was he dropping her off somewhere?

Karen watched his car disappear into the neighborhood before she finally moved away from the window.

Her hunch was tingling. Something was off.

But she couldn't quite put her finger on it since Jeffrey hadn't shown any affection. He just whisked Paige away.

Karen remembered Jeffrey mentioning that Paige was his buddy's cousin. Perhaps it was out of obligation that he had to personally see his ex off.

Knock, knock

Outside, Derek knocked on the door.

"Your mom's starting to make pies. You coming to join?"

"Oh, sure," Karen snapped back to reality and opened the door, "Is the filling ready?"

"Yep." Derek grinned, "Do you know if Jeffrey prefers his food savory or mild? Your mom and I tend to go light on the salt, but if he likes it flavorful. I can add a bit more."

"He's not picky."

Karen pulled up a chair, washed her hands, and sat down at the table.

Serena glanced at her daughter, sensing something was amiss. "Hey, where's Jeffrey?"

She had been busy in the kitchen and hadn't noticed who had come and gone.

"He's got some work stuff to handle," Karen didn't want to tarnish the image of Jeffrey she'd carefully curated for her parents, "He's been really buckling down at work lately. Barely has time for

me."

Derek joined at the table, his tone serious, "A man should focus on his career and take on more responsibility. You're not to throw a tantrum, got it? You two are in it for the long haul. Jeffrey's been bending over backwards for you."

"Dad, switching sides so soon?" Karen pouted, "You were totally against us at first. Now everything you say takes his side."

"Your dad was just worried 'cause Jeffrey's a catch; thought he might not be serious about you."

Serena spilled her thoughts, "But then we saw how good he is to you. A guy like Jeffrey could have his pick of girls, but he chooses to orbit around you - that's proof enough of his sincerity."

Karen felt a wave of reassurance listening to her parents sing Jeffrey's praises.

Despite the annoyance of dealing with his ex, Jeffrey's response had left her quite satisfied.

He had a past, and so did she - no point dwelling on that.

Chapter 679

"Mom, don't build up his ego at the expense of our own pride."

"What do you mean 'his'? Jeffrey's practically family now, with the engagement around the corner."

Karen chuckled so hard she had to lean back to catch her breath, musing to herself that Jeffrey really had a way with people. He'd managed to turn his image around in such a short time; the guy was seriously committed.

She shouldn't have doubted his intentions.

At that moment, Karen felt an unexpected flutter of pre-wedding bashfulness, the kind that sneaks up on you without any clear reason.

...

In the car, Jeffrey's lips were pressed into a tight line, his silence deafening.

Paige, sensing the mood, didn't dare make a sound. She sat shrunken in the back seat, stealing glances at Jeffrey's profile.

After driving for miles, far from the city center, Paige finally mustered the courage to speak up.

"Do you want to see the baby? It's a girl."

"What the hell are you thinking!" Jeffrey's temper flared, his patience finally snapping. He slammed on the brakes and pulled over to the roadside.

This remote area was naturally quiet, with few people around, especially in the dark of night.

"Get out," he said, his tone far from friendly.

Paige didn't hesitate, quickly opening the door and stepping out.

Jeffrey lit a cigarette, his profile illuminated by the flicker of his lighter, his jawline sharp and striking in the dim light.

That was part of the reason Paige couldn't let go.

Aside from being a cad and a heartbreaker, he had so much going for him – looks, height, family background, career, and his prowess in bed.

They sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity until Jeffrey, on his third cigarette, finally spoke in a deep voice, "How much do you want?"

"Do you think I'm only here for the money?"

"Do you expect me to marry you? Don't be delusional."

"My family isn't short of money either." Paige retorted. Though her family's wealth didn't hold a candle to Jeffrey's, they were well-off by any standard.

"Paige." Jeffrey calmed himself down as much as he could and said to her, in a smooth tone. "Are you sure the baby is mine?"

She trembled, disbelief etched on her face. "You know I was a virgin before we slept together. And I've given you everything. Do you have any idea how hard it was to hide the pregnancy? I was terrified my parents would make me abort, or that one of your friends would see me and tell you. I only breathed a sigh of relief when our daughter was born."

Jeffrey wanted to explode at her absurdity.

He wished the situation were different, that maybe she was still pregnant so he could use some leverage to make the problem go away.

But a child already born? What was he supposed to do, wish her dead?

"I don't want to hear it. Just tell me what you want to do." His mind was racing towards a standstill.

"I want you to marry me. I want us to be a family," Paige stated her terms outright.

"That's impossible!" Jeffrey raised his voice, glaring at her. "I'm getting engaged. What you're asking for is out of the question."

Paige looked at him, dumbfounded. "So you're planning to keep our child a secret from your fiancée?"

"That's my business. It has nothing to do with you."

"Jeffrey, you're such a jerk. If she finds out—"

Suddenly, Jeffrey turned and strode toward her, his hand shooting out to clutch her throat. He snarled menacingly, "If you let her find out, I'll make sure your family can't show their face in Eldorria City ever again."

## Chapter 680

Paige's gaze locked onto his eyes, and what she saw there chilled her to the bone. There was an unmistakable intent to kill, a fervor that was both intense and clear.

He hadn't considered her feelings, not for a second, and the plight of their child didn't seem to cross his mind either.

Feeling as if her brain was suffocating, the instinct to survive kicked in, and she began to struggle with all her might. "Jeffrey!"

It wasn't until her face turned an alarming shade of white that Jeffrey finally loosened his grip, his teeth clenched tightly.

"Don't think that by having a kid, you can get a hold on me. There's no way in hell I'd marry you. Dream on. If you know what's good for you, name your price and then get the heck out of Eldorria City. And don't you ever come back."

"Cough, cough, cough."

Air rushed back into Paige's lungs, and she coughed violently, unaccustomed to the sudden influx. Her legs gave way, and she began to slide to the ground.

"Think it over and text me," Jeffrey said curtly as he walked back to his car.

Paige called out to him in desperation, "Jeffrey! Where are you going?"

"To have dinner with my wife."

Paige could never have imagined that he would actually leave her stranded on the roadside.

They were far from downtown, in the outskirts where not even a taxi could be hailed.

"Jeffrey, I underestimated just how cold-hearted you could be."

When Karen called Jeffrey for the second time, he finally picked up. His voice was hoarse, as if he had been shouting.

"Mom and Dad are asking if you're coming home for dinner?"

"Of course. I'm already on my way," Jeffrey replied, his voice lightening with a chuckle. "Wait for me."

"Yeah. Did you send her packing?" Karen couldn't help but ask.

He knew exactly who 'her' referred to. "Yeah, don't get mad, I—"

"I'm not mad, really." Karen laughed. "I've gotten over your past. Don't worry, I won't make a fuss over your ex. But let's not let my parents find out. They're just starting to see you in a new light."

"Karen, I am so lucky to have you."

Caught off guard by the compliment, Karen was momentarily speechless. "Why the sudden sentimentality?"

"No reason."

"Hurry up, then. The pies will be ready soon, and they're best when they're fresh out of the oven."

"Alright."

After hanging up, Karen stepped out to see her father placing a tray of pies on the table.

"Where's Jeffrey?"

"He's on his way back. He said there was some trouble at the office, and he had to go back to the Lopez Corporation to get some documents."

Derek nodded, not thinking much of it. "I saw that woman looking for him earlier and thought..."

"She's just a colleague. Jeffrey was avoiding her because he didn't want to deal with the paperwork, so he dodged her. To think she'd follow him all the way to our doorstep. Can you believe that?"

"It was a bit surprising. So he's finished with work now?"

Karen nodded. "Yes, don't worry. I'm keeping an eye on him."

"I just hope you're not distracting him from his work."

Karen stuck out her tongue and made a playful face, Derek shook his head and said helplessly, "You're about to get married and still acting like a kid."

"I'll always be a kid to you guys. Mom said no matter how old I get, I'll always be your little girl."

When Jeffrey knocked on the door, they were still chatting animatedly inside.

Hearing the sound, Karen rushed to open it.

Jeffrey stood at the doorway, his pilot's uniform crisp and proper, his tall frame nearly filling the entrance. A polite smile graced his handsome face, a far cry from his usual nonchalant demeanor.

"Karen, I'm back."

"Great, come in and get ready for the pies." Karen bent down to fetch his slippers, then took his hand and led him inside.