

Midnight 681

Chapter 681

"Jeffrey, does it hit the spot?" Serena asked eagerly, nudging a plate of pies towards him across the table.

Jeffrey nodded vigorously, "Mom, they're delicious."

By now, everyone had gotten used to him addressing them as mom and dad.

After the meal, Jeffrey and Karen stayed a bit longer to catch a couple of episodes of a TV series with the old couple.

Afraid of delaying Jeffrey's work tomorrow, it was Derek who suggested they go back.

On the drive home, Karen was dozing off, fighting sleep the entire way.

Jeffrey was unusually quiet, just focused on driving.

It wasn't until they pulled up at the base of their villa that Karen opened her eyes and, peering at his profile, she raised an eyebrow, "Huh? Your ex-girlfriend was in your car today."

Jeffrey's grip on the steering wheel tightened for a moment, "She was in the back seat."

"So from now on, only I can sit shotgun, okay?" Karen leaned in, hoping to playfully tease him.

Jeffrey was taken aback, turning to look at her, "Are you jealous?"

"To be honest, not really jealous, but it's definitely uncomfortable. But I understand, you've had your fair share of flings in the past and there's always something to deal with. I knew what I was getting into when I agreed to be your girlfriend," she said.

"Karen, I..." Jeffrey's lips parted slightly, but the words seemed to get stuck in his throat.

She raised an eyebrow, "Well?"

"Nothing, let's get out," Jeffrey said, parking the car neatly and getting out.

Karen was surprised by his behavior. This material belongs to NôvelDrama.Org.

He wasn't usually like this, usually all talkative and never shutting up. Today, it seemed like he was weighed down with something heavy on his mind.

Could it be about his ex-girlfriend?

Karen followed him into the villa, wrapping her coat around herself. She thought he wouldn't be in the mood for intimacy tonight, but no sooner had she taken off her shoes than Jeffrey swept her into his arms, spinning her around and pinning her to the bed.

"Jeffrey, can you be a bit gentler?" she protested.

"Alright, I'll be gentle tonight," Jeffrey replied, surprisingly not arguing back and instead leaning in to kiss her.

Karen couldn't tell what was up with him, but she felt that he was a bit off today.

He was careful and considerate as they made love.

But as the fit was a bit tight, Karen still furrowed her brows and clutched his arms tightly.

"Jeffrey. Jeffrey."

"Karen, I want to have a child with you," he said, propping himself on his elbow and locking eyes with her.

Karen found herself unable to look away, her face flushed with a deep crimson, "You didn't wear a condom, and I... I didn't stop you, so why bring it up again."

"I want to hear you say that you'd have a child with me," he insisted, his gaze unyielding.

Karen tried to push him away, but his chest was as immovable as a rock, "If you keep this up, I'll be out of breath."

"Say it. I want to hear it."

"I will, okay?" she relented.

The moment her words fell, Jeffrey thrust deeper.

Karen wanted to recoil, but she was no match for his strength.

"Say it again."

"No. Are you trying to kill me?!"

Jeffrey lowered his head to her ear, his voice deep and husky, "If you don't say it, I'll take this week's quota tonight."

Once a day, that was the rule Karen had set.

"I'll say it. Jeffrey, I want to have your child, and I want to marry you."

Chapter 682

Heather was ushered into the confines of Swevia County under the cover of night.

Though blindfolded, she could sense the inky blackness enveloping her.

"Did you get my message through? I need to see Everett."

"We did. Whether Everett decides to see you, well, you can just wait and see."

The guards were clearly impatient, shoving her roughly into the vehicle without a word more.

That was all she needed.

Heather's only fear was that her message wouldn't reach him, that Everett would remain oblivious and she would meet her end without him ever knowing. But if he heard even a whisper about Dorothy, he would come. She was certain.

She braced herself for a long wait, but to her surprise, just a few hours later, at the crack of dawn, Everett appeared before her.

He was draped in a black trench coat, his towering 6'3" frame exuding a natural elegance with his lean waist and long legs. Though leaner than before, his aristocratic aura remained as imposing as ever.

Heather knew why he had come at such an hour. She diverted her gaze and offered a wry smile. "Is Dorothy asleep?"

"What's the story about Dorothy?"

Everett was blunt, dispensing with pleasantries, focused solely on the matter at hand.

Huddled in the corner, Heather peered through the iron bars that caged her. "Everett, tell me, if Dorothy didn't exist, could there be a chance for you to like me?"

He didn't answer, his eyes betraying a thinning patience.

It was always about Dorothy.

"Everett, answer me, and I'll tell you what you need to know."

"Without Dorothy, there is no Everett. Your question has no answer."

He wouldn't entertain the hypothetical, nor spare Heather a sliver of his attention. Material © NôvelDrama.Org.

"Ha, so I was doomed from the start, wasn't I? Back when we could be friends abroad, I actually believed that if I kept up with you, I could stand by your side." Heather realized how foolish she had been to think that Everett's affection for Dorothy was a mere youthful fancy, something that would falter with the slightest storm. That was why she had caused a scene, thinking there was an opening for her.

But during this time, Heather had reflected a great deal.

Most importantly, she understood that Everett's intentions had always been clear-cut. Dorothy was the only one he wanted; there had never been room for anyone else.

"Why didn't you make it clear sooner. Why keep your feelings hidden for so many years? Why did you make me believe there was a chance!"

Heather was clueless about the extent of Everett's machinations at home, unaware that he had never given up on Dorothy, and his plans for her had never wavered.

"You're the one with ulterior motives. You can't blame anyone else."

Everett had never offered her hope or promises.

"Yeah, I'm the villain." Heather's laugh turned into a bitter cackle. "In your eyes, I'm the worst, aren't I?"

Slowly, she rose from the ground and approached him, her fingers curling around the rusted iron bars.

"Even though I can't have you, don't think you can have Dorothy. Ha-ha, you two will never be together."

A chill flashed in Everett's eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Dorothy's mother died of a heart condition. You must have looked into it."

At the mention of Dorothy's mother, Everett's expression grew gloomy.

"Does Dorothy also think her mother passed away from a heart attack triggered by some distressing news?"

Chapter 683

Everett clenched his fists so tightly that his knuckles turned white, and the tension in his jaw sharpened its contours.

Heather burst into an unrestrained, almost maniacal laughter.

The sight was horrifying to watch.

"The truth is, Everett, it was your own mother who instructed the doctors at the hospital to administer the fatal dose of Digoxin to her mother. Just 10mg could kill an adult, and she got a whopping 50mg injection—of course, her heart gave out instantly. No miracle could've saved her."

A buzzing filled Everett's ears, drowning out all other sounds.

He could only watch as Heather's lips moved, her hysterical laughter piercing the silence.

"This can't be happening. It's impossible."

He had asked his father before, who had assured him his mother wasn't involved.

"And another thing. Everett, you might as well give up trying to hide the truth from Dorothy. She knows about your mother's masterpiece. Why do you think she left you? Why do you think she told you she was in love with Kenneth? Have you ever thought about that?"

The hospital's surveillance was supposed to be destroyed, but I made copies ahead of time, spread across several USB drives. I had the security room staff play dumb, selling one of the drives with the incriminating content to Dorothy for a pretty penny. And that footage? It was of your mother giving the order."

USB drives.

Everett found it increasingly difficult to breathe as if someone's invisible grip was squeezing his heart mercilessly.

Yes, the USB drive.

The one Dorothy had Byte 7 recover.

On it was the evidence of his mother's crime against Dorothy's mother.

"Heather, you'd better not be lying," Everett ground out through clenched teeth, each word heavy with venom.

"Why would I lie now? Go ahead, ask Dorothy if I'm telling the truth. Ask her if she can spend her life with you, or if she can stand having Amanda as her mother-in-law, and marry the son of the woman who murdered her own mother."

Everett's balance faltered, his large frame staggering backwards.

Suddenly, a sweet, metallic taste rose in his throat.

He reached to cover his mouth, but it was too late. A bright red gush spewed forth, running down his well-defined fingers. His pale hand was instantly stained with the spreading crimson.

Seeing him like this, Heather panicked, "Everett! Don't scare me, Everett! Somebody help, hurry!"

Soon, a swarm of guards rushed in, freezing at the sight.

"Mr. Lopez."

"Don't."

He raised his hand, signaling them to stay back, then turned and walked away, one unsteady step at a time.

His black coat concealed the blood, but not the scent that wafted through the air.

Behind him, Heather's laughter turned to inconsolable sobs. She slid to the ground, lacking the strength to stand again.

"Everett, I truly love you. I'd die with you if you asked. Dorothy can't give you her whole heart, but I can. Even if you asked me to kill my own parents, I would, but Dorothy couldn't."

The door of the detention room closed, and silence reclaimed the space.

Only the blood spattered on the floor remained, drying slowly.

"Everett, just turn back and look at me. I beg you. I love you more than Dorothy ever could. She doesn't deserve you, and she doesn't deserve to be by your side."

"Please."

"I'm begging you."

Chapter 684

Dorothy awoke with a start, the familiar warmth of another person conspicuously absent from her side.

Glancing at the clock, it read 7 AM – a time when Everett would normally be hunched over his desk, sifting through a mountain of paperwork. But now, he was nowhere to be found in the hospital room.

Concern knitting her brows, Dorothy rose to search for him. She checked the doctor's office, and the long, sterile corridors – no sign of him.

Returning to the room to grab her phone, she dialed Everett's number, only to hear his ringtone echo from within the room.

His phone was left behind.

Odd.

Very odd.

"Dr. Quincy. Have you seen Everett around?" Dorothy inquired, her voice tinged with worry as she ventured out again.

The doctor shook her head. "No, he's not in his room?"

"Nope. He was gone when I woke up."

"Well, perhaps you should check the security room? If he left the hospital, he would have had to go through the main or back door," suggested Dr. Quincy.

Dorothy nodded, a bit resigned. "Guess that's the only option I have."

In Swevia Country, she was out of her element. Other than calling Everett, she was at a loss for what to do.

As Dorothy made her way to the security room, Quincy called out from behind, "Ms. Sanchez. Mr. Lopez is at the front entrance."

Whirling around and peering down from the upper floor, Dorothy's eyes indeed caught the sight of Everett's figure at the hospital's entrance.

"Thanks." she called back, taking the stairs two at a time. She needed to find out what was going on, and why Everett had left the hospital so early in the morning.

From above, details were blurry.

Reaching the downstairs, Dorothy was taken aback at the sight of Everett up close – his complexion was ashen, and his lips drained of color, looking as if he were on the brink of collapse.

"Everett, what... what happened to you?" she gasped, instinctively rushing towards him, only to see him step back.

"I'm fine," he rasped, his voice a hoarse shadow of itself.

Dorothy frowned, her worry deepening. "Did you leave at dawn?"

If he had only left the room in the morning, a mere hour or two would not have reduced Everett to such a state.

"I'm tired. I just want to go rest for a while," he said, his gaze avoiding hers, an unusual behavior for him. With long strides, he began to walk past her, further into the hospital.

This was not like him at all.

Dorothy took a deep breath, catching up to him and tugging at his sleeve. "Everett, wait."

Despite his haste, he stopped at her touch, not wanting to risk pulling her along.

"What's going on? Talk to me," she implored, her lips pressed together, a knot of anxiety forming in her stomach.

She tried to look into his eyes for answers, but to no avail – he wouldn't meet her gaze.

"Nothing. I just felt like taking a walk, that's all."

"From dawn till now?" Dorothy stepped closer, reaching out to embrace him, when suddenly she caught a metallic scent.

Blood.

But the dark coat he wore masked the source.

"Yes, I lost track of time."

His answers were short, his voice heavy.

"That's not it. You have blood on you," Dorothy said, gripping his coat more firmly. The dried, flaking bloodstains marred her palm, a dark crimson.

Everett pressed his lips together tightly, pulling his coat away swiftly, then hastened his steps even more.

Confused and concerned, Dorothy had no choice but to run after him. "Everett! You promised you'd never lie to me. What did you do? Why is there blood on your clothes?"

He stopped, his silhouette halting as he half-turned towards her. "Dorothy, don't touch me, I'm filthy."

Chapter 685

Everett was a mess—a walking disaster area, so filthy that it seemed even he couldn't stand his own reflection.

"Everett, when have I ever complained about that?" Dorothy tried to grab his hand with a stubborn determination, but he jerked away, only for her to reach for him again.

Suddenly, Everett's towering figure pinned her against the wall, his grip on her hand unyielding. His long legs aggressively wedged themselves between hers, trapping her in place.

"Everett."

Before Dorothy could protest, his lips crashed down on hers.

It was wild and frantic.

As if this kiss was their last, he devoured her mouth, claiming it, unwilling to let go.

"Umm. Umm!" Dorothy felt the air being sucked from her lungs, her body going numb with confusion.

She tasted it—the metallic tang of blood from Everett's mouth, the same scent that clung to his clothes.

Was Everett hurt?

Dorothy wasn't struggling to escape him but rather to check where he was injured.

But her strength was no match for his, and she was left helpless under his fervent kiss.

Finally, feeling as though she was about to pass out, she bit his lip in a desperate attempt to make him stop. This belongs to NôvelDrama.Org.

Everett froze as if his senses had snapped back into place, and then he released her, striding away quickly.

Dorothy took a long moment to compose herself before she chased after him.

Back in the hospital room, Everett headed straight for the bathroom.

He didn't bother to remove his coat; instead, he stood under the shower fully clothed, letting the icy water soak through the fabric, a sobering chill against his skin.

Everett knew what he should be doing—investigating, confirming whether Heather's words were true or false.

That woman, always spewing lies, he thought. But this time, for some reason, he believed her.

"Everett, come out of there."

Dorothy banged on the bathroom door, "Are you trying to freeze to death? Who takes a cold shower in your state?"

She had assumed Everett was just in a rush to cleanse himself, given his notorious obsession with cleanliness. But seeing no steam on the door, Dorothy realized he hadn't turned on any hot water.

"You're still injured, for heaven's sake! Are you out of your mind? Everett, get out!"

Grinding her teeth, she pounded harder on the door. When there was still no response, she spun around to grab a chair from the room.

The bathroom door was glass, not solid wood—it should shatter easily.

Before she could swing, she yelled inside, "Everett, move away from the door! If you're not opening it, I'm breaking it down!"

At that, Everett's voice finally pierced through the cold air, trembling and hoarse.

"Leave me alone for a bit."

"Then tell me what happened first. Once you tell me, I'll leave."

"Dorothy, just ten minutes, okay? Let me be alone for a while."

Dorothy pursed her lips and slowly set the chair down, "Fine, ten minutes. One second more, and I'm smashing the door."

She left the hospital room and headed straight for Quincy's office.

"I need some cold medicine, fever reducers, and something for bruises and bleeding."

Quincy was taken aback, "Who's sick and injured? Mr. Lopez?"

"Maybe." Dorothy wasn't sure.

Quincy stood up immediately, "Then I'll come with you."

"No need, he won't let you in. Just give them to me, I'll handle it."

Chapter 686

Panting, Dorothy retraced her steps to the hospital room door, timing herself perfectly to arrive at the ten-minute mark. She pushed the door open.

True to his word, Everett hadn't locked it from the inside.

He emerged from the bathroom, drenched from head to toe, leaving puddles in his wake.

Dorothy knew he wasn't in the mood to talk, so she briskly went to the wardrobe, grabbed a change of clothes, and without waiting for his consent, began peeling off his soaked garments.

Everett didn't say a word, passively letting her strip away his wet clothes and dress him in fresh ones.

Once she was done, Dorothy felt nearly spent.

She wrapped her arms around Everett's waist and whispered, "How about you lie down for a bit, huh?"

"You're not gonna ask?"

"I'm not asking." She rested her cheek against his chest. "Whatever you found out there, I won't pry. Just tell me if you're hurt, let me put some ointment on, okay?"

He shook his head, his large hand pressing hers firmly against his heart.

"It hurts here."

"Should I call Dr. Quincy to check on you?"

"Only you can fix me."

Dorothy had a sinking feeling that his troubles had something to do with her, but she dared not ask.

With only a few days left in her one-month agreement with Jonathan, she didn't want to tear open wounds to peek into the future. She wanted to savor these last days with Everett.

She led him back to the bed and tucked him under a thick comforter, then clung to him tightly, sharing her warmth.

"Try to get some sleep, okay?"

She didn't insist on applying medicine, just wanted him to get some rest.

It was unclear when Everett had left that dawn, but one thing was sure: something had happened to him.

Suddenly, the hand he had laid on her waist tightened, pulling her entirely into his embrace.

"If I fall asleep, will you leave?"

"I won't. I'll stay right here with you."

"And afterward?"

Her lips quivered, eyes cast downward, "Everett, stop hurting yourself. Abigail and Langston are still waiting in Swevia Country. If you wear yourself out, they'll be left without a dad."

Abigail and Langston.

Yes, they had two kids together.

Their lives were intertwined in countless ways; it wouldn't all just end so easily.

"Dorothy, don't leave me alone."

"I won't." She freed a hand to stroke his hair. "Sleep, and I promise when you wake up, I'll still be here."

Despair clouded Everett's eyes, void of their usual spark.

He gazed at Dorothy, then leaned in for a kiss. NôvelDrama.Org owns this.

She didn't dodge, tilting her head to meet his lips.

She embraced the kiss, no matter how fierce and wild.

Everett's body was chilled from the cold shower, causing him to shiver uncontrollably. Dorothy shed her own clothes, using her body to warm him.

When the kiss ended, and she thought he might take things further, he simply lay there panting, moving no more.

"Everett, you..."

"I'm going to sleep."

He closed his eyes, but his lashes still fluttered.

Dorothy reached out to touch Everett's face, but he caught her wrist.

"I'm sorry."

"What?"

"Dorothy, I'm sorry."

He thought he could be Dorothy's salvation, leading her out of darkness.

Instead, he became the source of all her disasters.

Chapter 687

Everett mumbled an apologetic "I'm sorry" as he drifted off to sleep.

He must have been exhausted. Clutching Dorothy's hand seemed to be the only thing that gave him a moment's peace.

The eerie calm before the storm set his nerves on edge, but at least they could hold hands, wrapped in each other's arms, sharing a bed and pillow – that in itself was a blessing.

...

In the morning, Jeffrey woke up, cuddled with Karen for a while, and then went to brush his teeth and freshen up, shirtless.

She had nagged him several times about wearing pajamas or a robe, but Jeffrey just wouldn't listen.

Sure, he'd had his fair share of girlfriends, but he'd never cohabited. Dates were for hotels. At home, it had always been just him, so wearing clothes to bed wasn't his thing.

Now that he knew Karen liked his abs, he was even less inclined to cover up.

"Got a lot on at the office today?"

"Two meetings. Tech stuff. Everett doesn't trust anyone else with it, so I've got to step in," Jeffrey said with a grimace, electric toothbrush in hand as he turned to look at her. "What about you? Any plans?"

Karen shook her head, "Nope, just wondering when you'll be home."

"Should be back around two or three. Then I'll pick you up, and we'll go for some grub."

"You sound like you're bribing a kid," Karen muttered, following him into the bathroom.

Seeing her enter, Jeffrey, with his toothbrush clamped between his teeth, hurried to squeeze out some toothpaste for her.

"Being extra sweet, huh?"

"You know it." Jeffrey grinned, almost dropping his toothbrush in the process.

"I read online that men are at their kindest and most tender when they feel guilty. You hiding something?"

Thud—

Jeffrey's toothbrush finally fell. All rights © NôvelDrama.Org.

He bent down quickly to pick it up, his mind racing with how to explain his panic.

But standing up, he saw Karen was just joking, not pressing him on why his toothbrush had taken a dive.

Jeffrey let out a sigh of relief.

After freshening up, Karen grabbed her laptop and settled into the living room.

Her job didn't require her to clock in at an office, so she made herself comfortable in the spacious living room of Jeffrey's villa, with a small desk in place. Working there gave her the feeling of being the boss of her own time.

That day, Jeffrey donned a suit, all in black, tailored to perfection, making him look tall and lean.

Karen ran over, barefoot, to help him with his tie.

"Bend down a bit. You're too tall, I can't reach."

Jeffrey laughed, both helplessly and fondly, squatting slightly and leaning against the back of the sofa to let her fiddle with his tie.

Her hands were small, soft, and fair, like those of an infant.

Fumbling over his chest, it was hard for him to focus.

"Done yet, Karen?"

"Almost there."

Jeffrey clenched his teeth, "If you don't hurry up, I'm going to be distracted by other thoughts."

Karen let go immediately, "You do it. I can't."

"Why didn't you say so sooner."

Jeffrey took a few deep breaths, then grabbed his car keys, "I'm off. Call me if you need anything."

"Sure. Bye." Karen waved at him, then watched as Jeffrey walked to the entrance and closed the door behind him.

She was about to settle back on the sofa when the doorbell rang.

Huh?

Was that Jeffrey forgetting something?

Chapter 688

"Coming." Karen couldn't be bothered to put on her shoes and ran straight to the door.

But she was cautious, peering through the peephole before swinging it open.

It wasn't Jeffrey. It was his ex.

Suddenly, Karen felt a twinge of annoyance. This one was nothing like the woman she'd bumped into at the mall, who had at least the ability to read the room. But this one was clingy, like chewing gum stuck to the sole of your favorite sneakers.

Karen toyed with the idea of pretending she wasn't home, but the woman outside had already started shouting.

"I know you're there, open up. We need to talk."

Silence.

She even knew Karen was home. Had she bugged the place?

With a sigh, Karen draped a cardigan over her shoulders and slipped into a pair of loafers before opening the door. If she was going to face her romantic rival, she wasn't about to do it looking like she'd just rolled out of bed.

Paige's eyes widened at the sight of Karen.

"What are you doing here?"

Quick as a whip, Karen realized the comment had been intended for Jeffrey. She scoffed internally at the thought that she'd been worried about this woman's 'powers.'

"In Jeffrey's house, seeing his fiancée, what's so surprising? But bumping into his ex, now that's unexpected."

Karen's sharp tongue was no stranger to Paige.

And Paige knew better than to expect any concessions in a war of words.

"Where's Jeffrey?" she asked, masking her irritation.

"You're looking for him?" Karen feigned ignorance.

Paige's cheeks flushed with anger. "Of course, who else?"

Karen feigned a laugh. "Well, if you're looking for him, why ask me? Don't tell me you've lost his number. Or maybe you called and he's not picking up?"

"You—"

"Me what?" Karen stepped back, appraising her with a snort. "You thought I wouldn't be at Jeffrey's place, and you could just swoop in for a sleepover, huh? Is that why you are dressing so slutty?"

At a loss for words, Paige could only retort weakly, "I am not."

"Please, it's barely 50 degrees out, and I'm shivering under the covers while you're knocking on a man's door in shorts and a tight sweater, telling me you're not here to seduce my fiancé? That's rich. You might as well slap me with your intentions."

"I...I always dress like this. Jeffrey loves my legs," Paige blurted out defensively.

Karen glanced down at Paige's legs—fair and long. Jeffrey did have good taste.

"I see. Well then, why don't you just cut them off and leave them here? I'll make sure to pass them to Jeffrey when he gets back."

Silence. Content © NôvelDrama.Org.

"Going to do it? No? Then I'm closing the door. It's freezing."

She had work to do, after all.

Paige backed down, frustration evident on her face.

Paige wanted to spill the beans about the baby to the woman in front of her, and to wipe that smug look off her face. But just thinking about Jeffrey's viciousness the last time he grabbed her by the neck and warned her not to talk about it, she was truly afraid.

"Don't think that just because you've moved into this mansion, you'll end up marrying Jeffrey."

"Have you ever lived here?" Karen was genuinely curious.

But seeing Paige's reaction, Karen felt satisfied.

It seemed Jeffrey had been telling the truth.

He'd never brought another woman home.

"I'm going to be Jeffrey's wife sooner or later. Karen, you shouldn't be too smug about it, because you're no match for me."

In any aspect, there was no comparison.

Karen smacked her lips, arms crossed over her chest as she stared down her adversary, "You should save that speech for Jeffrey because, unlike you, I'm the one he's been begging to marry him. You? You're the one he wouldn't take back even if you came gift-wrapped."

Chapter 689

"He'll have to choose me. Because we're bound by ties that can't be broken in this lifetime." Paige's voice carried a peculiar certainty, as if she possessed some sort of leverage over Jeffrey.

It was as though she held a trump card in this twisted game of hearts.

Could it be simply because she was the cousin of Jeffrey's buddy? Did she think that Jeffrey owed his friend enough to spare some consideration for his cousin's feelings?

"Well then, why don't you go ahead and discuss this little situation with Jeffrey? Let's see if he's willing to swap his bride-to-be for you," Karen said, not bothering to sugarcoat her words as she shut the door in Paige's face.

Karen was not one to be threatened or intimidated. Not by anyone.

Even when Heather stood there with a knife at her throat, Karen didn't bow her head. So why would she ever concede to a romantic rival?

Paige was obviously trying to stir up trouble between Karen and Jeffrey, hoping to benefit from their fallout.

But Karen wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

Outside the door, Paige's face turned ashen with rage, yet she was powerless against Karen's resolve.

Gritting her teeth, Paige pulled out her phone and dialed Jeffrey's number.

No answer.

Predictable.

She thought for a moment, then snapped a photo of his villa and sent it to him.

This prompted a swift response. Jeffrey called back immediately, his voice laced with urgency.

"Paige, don't push your luck."

"Me, push my luck?" Paige retorted, stung by the insult. "Think carefully about how you speak to me, Jeffrey. I am standing right outside your place. Do you want me to tell that woman inside about your daughter?"

A moment of charged silence.

"You looking for trouble?" Jeffrey's voice was tight with anger.

"Better than the hell I'm living right now."

The sound of Jeffrey grinding his teeth was almost audible through the phone.

"Get away from my house. Now."

"Then come and see me." Paige laid down her terms.

"I'm at work. How am I supposed to come see you?"

"You would if it were her asking. If she can, so can I." Paige paused, her voice chilling. "Half an hour, Jeffrey. If you don't show up, I'll tell her everything."

Jeffrey had underestimated Paige's audacity. But with Paige literally outside his house, and Karen inside, he was caught in a bind.

"Fine, come to Lopez Corporation, I'll meet you downstairs. Happy?"

"You're trying to lure me away from here?"

"Paige, don't push it. Even if you tell Karen, the worst I get is an argument, maybe a breakup, but I'll never marry you."

Paige clenched her fists, knowing she couldn't afford to spill the beans to Karen. On one hand, she feared Jeffrey could retaliate against her family's business, and on the other, revealing her secret would strip her of any leverage over Jeffrey.

At least for now, she could negotiate and have a chance to see him face to face.

"Alright, I'll come to Lopez Corporation," Paige conceded, adding a warning, "And don't you dare ignore my calls again."

"Cut the crap."

The line went dead.

Not a shred of patience was afforded to her.

Paige took a deep breath and glanced back at Jeffrey's villa one more time.

One day, she vowed, she would live there, as Jeffrey's wife.

What was this temporary struggle compared to that? Once Jeffrey saw their child, and the Turners acknowledged the little one, there would be no reason left to shut her out.

On the other end, Jeffrey hung up on Paige and immediately called Karen.

His fingers trembled as he held the phone.

Chapter 690

Karen picked up the phone quickly, the clickety-clack of her keyboard humming in the background.

"What's up?" She paused her typing.

"Just now..."

"Oh, right. Your ex dropped by," Karen said nonchalantly, her eyes glued to the computer screen, "Said something about replacing me. What, she reach out to you?"

"Karen, don't listen to her crap."

Jeffrey's tone was fierce enough to chew nails, which only made Karen chuckle.

"Jeez, Mr. Turner, watch your language, will ya? Chill out, I'm not mad. Go finish up your work and come pick me up later, I'm in the mood for some BBQ tonight."

"Deal. I'll swing by after work."

Hanging up, Jeffrey felt a weight lift off his shoulders.

But he knew that if Paige kept this up, the truth would come out sooner rather than later.

He had to deal with this mess, and fast.

Jeffrey even thought, if only Karen were pregnant right now, maybe for the baby's sake, she might cut him some more slack?

...

Paige's call came soon after.

Jeffrey's villa was just a stone's throw from the Lopez Corporation.

He hurried downstairs, donning a face mask to avoid any paparazzi.

Spotting Paige, he pulled her aside into a secluded corner with such force there was nothing tender about it, causing her to stumble.

"Jeffrey, I..."

"Didn't you get what I told you?" Jeffrey rolled his tongue in his cheek, his eyes seething, "You had the nerve to show up at my place?"

Paige looked wronged, waving her hands, "I came looking for you. I didn't expect Karen to be at your villa. Didn't you say that you'd never bring a woman over?"

"She's my fiancée. Where else would she stay?"

Irritated, Jeffrey started patting his pockets for a cigarette, but he'd left in such a hurry he forgot them.

Hands on his hips, he paced back and forth before fixing his gaze on Paige, "That kid you're talking about, let's find time to do a DNA test."

Paige went pale, her eyes welling up with tears.

"You're doubting me?"

"Shouldn't I?" Jeffrey retorted, "Paige, we broke up years ago. It was a fluke we slept together again, and now you claim we have a child. I need proof, for all I know I could be an unwitting dad."

Before he could finish, Paige raised her hand to slap him.

But Jeffrey was taller, and she had to jump to reach him.

He grabbed her wrist before she could touch him and pushed her back into the corner.

"Want to get physical? I've said it before, I don't discriminate when it comes to throwing punches."

"Jeffrey, I've only ever been with you, and now you doubt my integrity?"

"I don't have a tracker on you, how should I know how many you've had?" Jeffrey was anything but chivalrous, "Even if we go to court, you'll need evidence to claim the kid is mine."

"Fine." Paige bit her lip, "You want a DNA test? I'll bring my daughter. I'm not afraid of the results. And when she grows up, I'll make sure she knows just what kind of lowlife her father is, doubting even her existence."