

The Kiss 1081

Chapter 1081

Ellinor had just eaten and wasn't hungry at all, but she didn't want to see Chloe pacing back and forth in front of her. So she said, "That's cool, Chloe. Thanks anyway!"

That was the only way to get Chloe off her back for a while.

Karan probably felt the same way.

Once Chloe was out of sight, Ellinor was led by Karan to sit down. "Ellinor, what's up? Why did you decide to pay the monastery a visit out of the blue? Something happen?"

Ellinor was touched. A true friend would always ask how she was doing.

Ellinor shook her head, "Don't sweat it; I'm good! I just happened to be in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop by."

Karan genuinely cared about her. She nodded and then asked, "How's the search for your mom going?"

Ellinor had told Karan about her mother when she was a child. Karan knew all the efforts she had put in over the years.

Ellinor shook her head, feeling a bit helpless, "Didn't find my mom, not even her body. But I did find some other family."

"Really? How are they doing? Have you met them?"

"No, they ditched my mom and me. I ain't claiming them."

"Ellinor, you remind me of myself when I was young; that's why I can't seem to let go of you."

After hearing Karan's words, Ellinor felt a bit dazed.

In fact, she didn't know much about Karan's past. She only knew that Karan came to this small mountain village alone and chose to become a nun under the guidance of Evelyn from the local monastery.

But for some reason, Evelyn ordered her not to wear a veil but to practice with her hair exposed.

"Ellinor, the fact that you can't forgive them means you still care about them. You haven't let go." Karan's eyes seemed to flicker as she said this, and she sighed lightly.

Ellinor could be a bit aggressive, but in front of Karan, she would become gentle and compliant.

"Karan, have you forgiven those who hurt you?"

Karan's eyes deepened, "I can't forgive them."

The loose strands of hair that fell from her headpiece were like the entanglements she could never let go of.

"Ellinor, I actually have a son. I miss him a lot."

Ellinor was a bit surprised; this was the first time she heard Karan mention that she had a son.

“Karan, how old is your son?”

Karan took a deep breath and let out a sigh, “He should be almost thirty this year. I wonder if he’s married. Is he doing well?”

Ellinor asked, somewhat confused, “Karan, haven’t you considered going back to see your son?”

Karan lowered her eyes, quietly saying, “What’s the point of going to see him? I don’t want to see his father again.”

Ellinor furrowed her brows, “Your ex-husband? Why don’t you want to see him? Did he do something to hurt you? Was he abusive or...?”

*He never hit me, but he betrayed me many times.”

Chapter 1082

Maybe because it had been a long time since she talked about her past, Karan patted Ellinor’s shoulder meaningfully and said, “Ellinor, don’t fall for men’s sweet talk. They’re all good at acting passionate.”

“Karan, that’s a bit too much. There are good guys too, like me.” Just then, Bartlett Rex walked in, interrupting Karan.

“Who’s this?” Karan looked at Bartlett.

*Just an acquaintance.” Ellinor glanced at Bartlett with a hint of disdain in her eyes.

Acquaintance? She had known him for so long, and she couldn’t even use the word “friend” to describe him?

Bartlett felt a bit awkward and introduced himself,

“Hi Karan, I’m Ellinor’s friend. I came to see you with her. You can call me Bartlett.”

Karan looked at him, then at Ellinor, seeming a bit worried, “Ellinor, do you have a boyfriend now?”

Ellinor didn’t hide anything from Karan. She nodded and said, “Yes, I have a boyfriend, but it’s not him. To be more precise, he’s my boyfriend’s **friend**, not mine.”

Karan was silent for a while, then asked again, “Ellinor, your boyfriend didn’t accompany you, but let his friend do it instead?”

“No, I ran into him here. He wanted to visit the monastery.”

Karan looked at Bartlett again and said seriously, “Can you please leave us alone for a moment? I need to talk to Ellinor in private.”

Bartlett shrugged and said with a relaxed smile, “Sure, I’ll go for a stroll nearby. I won’t disturb your chat. Ellinor, I’ll come back for you later.”

Then he winked at Ellinor and left.

Ellinor looked at Bartlett's casual manner and was a bit annoyed. She had told him that the monastery was not a place for him to mess around.

"What kind of person is your boyfriend?"

After Bartlett left, the usually calm Karan suddenly grabbed Ellinor's wrist as her eyes filled with worry.

Ellinor was slightly taken aback, "He... is a bit older than me. A pretty good person, I guess..."

"Does he treat you well?"

"I guess so."

Ellinor's answer was vague. She had been reevaluating her relationship and future with Theo.

But she didn't want to say too much and didn't want to worry Karan.

Karan looked into Ellinor's eyes for a long time, then looked up at the cross on the wall, "Back then, my husband was also very good to me. I thought I was the happiest woman in the world. But not long after we got married, he started not coming home, not answering my calls, and getting impatient with me, and we started arguing.

Later, I barely saw him in a year, while he spent every night with different women, many of whom bore his children."

Chapter 1083

Ellinor furrowed her brows. Even a steady and wise person like Karan had encountered such a rotten guy!

"Karan, you've had it tough!"

Karan looked at Ellinor with affection, saying profoundly, "Ellinor, sometimes it only takes a moment or a single sentence to get tired of someone.

I used to be troubled, wondering what I did wrong to make him so reluctant to see me.

Later, I realized that his actions had no legitimate reason. He just didn't like being with me anymore. It was as simple as getting tired of a certain food.

In this world, there's no such thing as everlasting love."

Ellinor thought about the past between her father, McNeil Howard, and her mother.

McNeil had ardently pursued and confessed his love to her mother, but once he got her, everything changed. He had affairs, and then came the illegitimate children. Maybe that's how guys behave. They mean it when they say they love you, and they really fall out of love when they say they don't, right?

Was Karan reminding her to prepare herself emotionally? Telling her not to trust love too much like she did before and end up hurting herself?

As

Elinor was trying to decipher the meaning in Karan's words, Karan continued, "Ellinor, I've been unable to let go of many things in the secular world, so Evelyn asked me not to become a nun until I've completely let go of my worldly worries.

And as for you, I've always been a bit selfish."

This was something Ellinor had never considered before. She asked in surprise, "Karan, are you asking me to do something for you?"

Karan was silent for a while before speaking again, "You know I have a son; he's my only concern in this world.

You've always been different from other girls; I really like you, so I've always hoped that when you grew up, you'd be with my son."

Ellinor was taken aback, she didn't expect Karan's hope to be this. She felt a bit awkward, "Uh... this..."

Karan

seemed to worry that Ellinor misunderstood her intentions, so she hastily explained, "Ellinor, don't get me wrong. Although I'm thinking about my son's future marriage, I care about you just the same. I hope you don't meet an irresponsible guy like I did and waste your life.

My husband may be a womanizer, but my son isn't like that. He's always despised his father. He once vowed to either stay away from women his whole life or be faithful to one woman for life.

My son is the only man I trust. He's worth entrusting a lifetime to, so I hope you can be with him and spare yourself some emotional pain."

Chapter 1084

Ellinor never thought Karan would advertise her own son this way

"Karan, I'm sorry to let you down, but I have a boyfriend now."

Karan sighed with a helpless smile, "I get it. I might have overstepped. Ellinor, you're such a great girl, no wonder so many boys are into you. You having a boyfriend is only normal.

I've watched you grow up and thought of you as my own child, so I genuinely hope you find a man worthy of your devotion."

Ellinor nodded, "Karan, thanks for understanding"

Karan felt a bit down. She had truly hoped to groom Ellinor as her future daughter in law

Even the name Ellinor was of her own making.

When Ellinor first arrived at the nunnery, she was called Lunar Mendoza.

Karan felt that Lunar Mendoza was too remote and lonely, hence the change to Ellinor.

She hoped Ellinor could meet someone truly caring and stubborn, like a weed that possessed an unyielding life force.

Also, there was something she never told Ellinor.

Her son was named Theo Blanchet.

Ellinor and Theo, she had a hunch that these two would hit it off.

If the two people she cared most about in the world could be together and look after each other, she would have one less worry.

Back then, she always had a feeling that once Ellinor grew up and left the nunnery, she would meet her son and they would possibly get together.

She knew all too well that the Blanchet family would line up the most beautiful and well-bred girls for her son.

She also knew her son's taste. Theo wouldn't like those bland girls.

She didn't want or wish for her son to become a pawn in a business marriage, unable to choose the person he wanted to spend his life with.

"Ellinor, if one day you find that your boyfriend no longer treats you well, you can always come back to me." Karan said as she clutched Ellinor's hand.

Ellinor smiled faintly, "Karan, you've been worrying about me all these years. Thank you. I'm fully prepared for all possibilities in the future, so don't worry too much about me; I'll take care of myself."

Karan looked at her, then managed to muster a reassuring smile.

Just then, Chloe hurried in, "Ellinor, your favorite vegan dishes are ready. Go eat while it's hot, okay?"

Ellinor turned to Karan, "Karan, you must be hungry too, right? Shall we grab a bite?"

Karan waved it off, "I'm not hungry; you go ahead and eat up. I'm a bit troubled today; I'm thinking of doing some meditation to calm my mind."

After hearing this, Ellinor didn't press further, and she obediently nodded, "Okay then."

Chapter 1085

Chloe didn't give a hoot if Karan wanted to grab a bite or not. She only cared about the person who was willing to donate money to the monastery, and thus she cheerfully dragged Ellinor away, "Let's go, Ellinor! I'll take you to get some grub. Karan will get her own when her stomach starts to grow!"

Ellinor didn't want to disturb Karan's spiritual practice, so she gave a respectful bow to Karan who had nurtured her and then trailed behind Chloe.

As they stepped out of the main hall, they saw Bartlett under a big tree outside, plucking leaves.

He was looking up, so his side profile was under the glow of the sunset through the leaves, making him look even more handsome.

Such a charming dude didn't belong in a monastery, he could blow his cover.

Bartlett seemed to feel the gaze on him. He turned to look at Ellinor, and said, "Done talking to Karan?"

Ellinor replied with an indifferent tone.

Chloe glanced at Bartlett, then at Ellinor. She was sensing something, so she grinned, "Ellinor, is this hun ky guy your friend?"

Ellinor frowned a bit, "Sort of."

Chibe looked at Bartlett's neat attire and couldn't help but give him a thumbs up, "Why don't you invite him to lunch then?"

Bartlett responded enthusiastically, "Really? I'd love to!"

Ellinor gave him a sideways glance, "You were just turning up your nose at the simple food at the inn; the food here is even more basic, so are you sure you want to eat it?"

Bartlett shrugged it off with a smile, "Why not? I'll give it a shot! If you never try, you'll never know, right? Besides, this isn't just any vegetarian food; it's from a monastery! I heard eating monastery food can cleanse the soul."

Chloe laughed along, "Right on! This gentleman's got it. Veggie meals can really calm the soul; it's good for you."

Bartlett replied with a smile, "Well, thank you then."

Ellinor scoffed, "You're not afraid eating this meal will blow your cover?"

Bartlett was taken aback, "What?"

Ellinor mocked impatiently, "I mean, a handsome guy like you shouldn't be hanging around a monastery, let alone eating vegetarian food. You might reveal your true colors!"

Bartlett paused before breaking into a laugh, "Ellinor, should I take that as a compliment on my good looks?"

Ellinor ignored him. She picked up her pace and followed Chloe.

Truth be told, she wasn't hungry at all, but coming back here made her miss the taste of her childhood, so she at least wanted to try some.

But when it was time to eat, Ellinor couldn't stomach it.

The

taste was familiar, but she was full. Pregnancy had altered her taste buds, making it hard for her to swallow the veggies that were mixed with carrots. She held a fork and took a few bites.

Surprisingly, Bartlett, who was picky about the food at the inn, found the monastery's vegetarian food to his liking. Not only did he finish his portion, he even polished off the bit Ellinor couldn't finish.

Chapter 1086

Ellinor was pretty peeved when Bartlett just helped himself to her food without asking. She didn't even get a chance to protest

She mulled it over for a bit, but she'd only taken a few bites anyway. Since he'd already eaten it and seemed to love it, she shrugged it off.

After polishing off the meal, Bartlett put down his cutlery and beamed, saying, "Chloe, I've never realized vegetarian food could be this tasty! If I ever find the time, can I drop by for a meal?"

Chloe smiled and nodded, "Of course, but our monastery's quite shabby; you might not find it very comfortable."

Bartlett looked around and noticed the worn-out corners, "This place could use some sprucing up! It'd be much comfier **for** you guys too!"

Pretending to be troubled, Chloe sighed, "We've been wanting to fix it up! But there aren't many people living up on this mountain, and we're always strapped **for** cash. The donations we receive barely cover our meals, let alone renovations!"

Bartlett sympathized, "Really? That's tough. In that case, I..."

Ellinor knew exactly what Bartlett was about to offer, so she interjected, "Chloe, didn't I send a good chunk of money to the monastery? Didn't you say you were going to use it for renovations?"

Chloe, who was expecting Bartlett to speak again, was caught off guard by Ellinor. She squirmed a bit before explaining, "Ellinor, the money you sent was used mainly to fix up the main halls of the monastery. We've gotta take care of Jesus' place first! As for the remaining money, Karan donated it all. Now we've got nothing left for our own quarters. You've been away for so long, so you wouldn't know how the roof leaks in the summer and lets the cold in during the winter. It's really tough..."

Ellinor narrowed her eyes. She'd just inspected the main halls, and there were no signs of major renovations, just some minor touch-ups. It shouldn't have cost much. And the money she had sent over the years wasn't a small amount. There was no way Karan donated everything!

Chloe and the others must have pocketed the rest.

Now here was Chloe, putting on a poor act in front of her and Bartlett and hinting that they should donate again?

Money wasn't the issue. But the money donated should be used for its purpose, not as extra income for them to split!

These nuns were so worldly...

Ever since Evelyn passed away and Chloe took over the management of the monastery, things had changed.

And she was not about to let them take advantage of her.

But Bartlett seemed unfazed by it all. He chuckled, “Chloe, don’t worry about it. I’ll get some donations sent over when I get back, and I’ll spread the word about your situation to get more visitors over.”

Chloe’s face lit up, “Thank you so much!”

Upon hearing Bartlett’s words, Ellinor frowned.

Chloe’s gratitude sounded more like mockery.

Bartlett seemed to be everywhere, sticking his nose in everything.

But if someone else wanted to donate, who was she to stop him? It wasn’t her money anyway. So she got up, said her goodbyes to Chloe, and left.

Chapter 1087

Ellinor had planned to say goodbye to Karan in the main hall but feared she might interrupt her meditation. After some thought, Ellinor decided to leave the monastery.

While stepping out of the monastery, Ellinor spotted Collin by the car on the phone. He spoke into the device with the utmost respect, “Yes, siri I understand, I’ll make sure Ellinor is safe and sound!”

Ellinor frowned. It seemed like Collin had reported all her actions to that man.

However, that man hadn’t called her or even sent a single text.

It was quite thought-provoking.

And

that man used to be pretty jealous, but after learning that she was with Bartlett, he didn’t even call to question her?

Maybe this meant that he was really losing interest in her. Didn’t he care about her anymore?

He probably had Collin protecting her just because of the baby in her belly, nothing more!

Without a word, Ellinor got into the car.

Bartlett rushed out and hopped in the car with her.

“Ellinor, why didn’t you wait for me?”

Ellinor shot

him a cold look, “Wait for you? You’re too busy living it up to show up, and you blame me for not waiting?”

Bartlett was quite riled up, “I was discussing donations with Chloe, and I asked her for an account number! I had no idea you’d leave now!”

Ellinor frowned, “Why are you donating to this monastery? Do you have too much money and nowhere to spend it?”

Bartlett looked innocent, "Is it wrong to donate? I see the nuns here struggling, and I want to improve their lives! It's charity, it's contributing to the world!" Ellinor snorted, "You really think your money's gonna be used for the monastery? I've donated so much over the years, and I've seen no improvement here!"

Bartlett was slightly taken aback, "Are you suggesting that Chloe would embezzle the funds?"

Ellinor smirked, "I didn't say that! If you want to donate, go ahead. It has nothing to do with me!"

Bartlett shrugged, "Alright! I'll donate less. This place did raise you, after all. So the people here are your benefactors. Even if the money ends up in Chloe's hands, consider it repayment for her care over the years."

Ellinor frowned deeply, "What does it have to do with you if this place raised me? Bartlett, aren't you being a bit nosy?"

Bartlett shrugged nonchalantly, "Maybe? If that's how you see it, I can't help it!"

Ellinor rolled her eyes, "If that's what you think, I suggest you keep your money! Because Chloe never took care of me, she's not my benefactor! The only one who's been good to me is Karan! Mr. Rex, no matter how much money you have, it sure as hell didn't grow on trees. Save it for your wedding!"

Chapter 1088

Bartlett leaned in close to Ellinor, "I've saved up enough dough for marriage; I just haven't found the right gal yet. I don't even know where to start looking. Ellinor, can you help me out?"

Ellinor twisted her lips in distaste. She was ready to tell him to back off when the driver's door opened and Collin walked in. He cleared his throat, "Ahem!"

Bartlett didn't seem phased, he just straightened up casually.

Collin asked thoughtfully, "Mr. Rex, where are you headed?"

Bartlett answered straightforwardly, "I want to go where Ms. Mendoza is staying. You guys can just bring me along. If we live close, we can watch each other's backs if anything comes up."

Collin clearly wasn't keen on the idea, "Mr. Rex, I'm sorry, but Ms. Mendoza is headed to the Howard's Mountain Villa. It might not be convenient for **you** to tag along."

Bartlett raised an eyebrow, "The Howard's Mountain Villa? That's even better. I can just give Balfour a call!"

As he said this, he pulled out his phone, ready to dial Balfour's number.

Ellinor, unable to stand it, snatched his phone and hung up the call before it went through. She asked irritably, "Mr. Rex, what are you trying to do?"

Bartlett feigned innocence, "Ellinor, we're friends. I'm glad to see a familiar face in this strange place. I just want to live close to you so we can watch out for each other. That's **not** too much to ask, is it? I'd be scared living alone up on the mountain. Can't you sympathize with a single guy like me?"

Ellinor clearly didn't believe he was scared, so she scoffed, "If you're so scared, why'd you come alone? Even if I wasn't here, you'd still be living alone, wouldn't you?"

Bartlett frowned slightly, "You're right! I didn't think it through before I came. If you guys hadn't reminded me, I would have forgotten that the Howards had a vacation villa up here. I could give Balfour a call; he might even have time to vacation with me."

Ellinor didn't want Bartlett to call Balfour. If Balfour knew she was here, he might come.

She didn't want Balfour to come. He was still recovering from a foot injury from saving her last time. There was no need for him to come up the mountain.

Ellinor thought for a moment, then handed the phone back to Bartlett, "Don't call Mr. Howard. He's injured and doesn't have the time to entertain you!"

Then she turned to Collin, "Fine, let him come to the Howard's Mountain Villa."

Collin frowned but reluctantly agreed, "Alright, Ms. Mendoza."

Bartlett grinned, "It's been a while since I last visited that place; I think the last time was during our school days..."

Ellinor cut him off without hesitation, "Mr. Rex, can you please shut up? Nobody wants to hear about your

Bartlett shrugged and laughed, then finally quieted down.

Half an hour later, Collin drove them back to the Howard's Mountain Villa.

childhood."

Everyone there knew Bartlett as a friend of young Mr. Blanchet. After Bartlett explained his reason for coming, the villa's butler courteously arranged for someone to prepare a guest room for him.

Ellinor didn't concern herself with Bartlett's arrangements and went straight back to her own room.

Collin dutifully followed her, waiting until they were alone to remind her, "It's best if you don't get too close to Mr. Rex."

Ellinor had never planned to get close to Bartlett, but she was curious, as she had been warned before not to get too close to him.

Chapter 1089

She had some one-on-one encounters with Jonah Wyton and Kemp Larios before, but she didn't feel that they were distant with Theo the way Bartlett was.

"Why though? Isn't Mr. Rex a longtime buddy of Mr. Blanchet's? Shouldn't I be on good terms with Mr. Rex?"

Collin's face was a mix of emotions, "Mr. Rex is indeed a long-time friend of Mr. Blanchet's, **but** they're not exactly best buds.

In fact, Mr. Rex was closer with Mr. Howard, and Jonah and Kemp were tight with Mr. Blanchet.

Jonah **and** Kemp would never do anything to hurt Mr. Blanchet, and they won't act inappropriately towards you.

But Mr. Rex is a different story. He and Mr. Blanchet are business rivals, and his attitude towards you has never been quite pure. He won't hold back."

Ellinor chuckled lightly, "I see. So, even good friends have their ups and downs. They even compete for women!

But Collin, don't worry about it. I have zero interest in Mr. Rex. I won't even give him the chance to try and make a move."

After hearing Ellinor's firm response, Collin felt a little relieved, "Good to hear. Mr. Blanchet said you should give him a ring."

Ellinor paused, "Alright, I'll call him later. You should rest now, I'll lock up here. There's no need to keep watch at the door."

"Sure"" Collin

nodded. He was indeed tired and couldn't keep going on like this. If he did, he might not have the energy when Ellinor really needed him. That would

be even worse.

Ellinor had her fill of food and wouldn't eat any food sent over by the Howards. Mrs. Howard didn't dare to make a move on Ellinor openly either, so things were safe for now.

Collin went to rest.

Bartlett

didn't bother Ellinor again either. He went to the room the Howards' servants had prepared for him and didn't come out again.

After taking a bath, Ellinor came out of the bathroom, still towel-drying her hair. She lazily laid down on the big bed in the Howards' guest room, picked up her phone, hesitated for a moment, and then dialed Theo's number.

"Hello?"

The call was picked up after a while. Theo's voice was as deep and magnetic as always; he sounded a bit tired, like he had just woken up.

There was a time difference between the two countries, so it wasn't surprising that he was sleeping at this time.

Ellinor calmly said, "Collin told me to call you."

A hint of annoyance was present in his voice, "You only call when you're told to? Can't you take the initiative to call me?"

She really wanted to say something back. He was blaming her, but he hadn't taken the initiative to call her in days.

"Do you have something to say?" Ellinor ignored his comment and asked casually.

Theo was silent for a few seconds before saying, "Listen..."

He was interrupted by a woman's voice that came from his end of the call.

Theo, what are you doing? Hurry up! We're leaving!"

Chapter 1090

Ellinor picked up on the fact that it was the same woman who had answered Theo's phone when Veronica called. It felt like a punch to the gut. She didn't ask and just waited in silence, hoping he'd explain who the woman was on his own.

But he didn't.

In a rush, Theo told her, "Babe, you should get some sleep. I need to step out for a bit."

Ellinor didn't get a chance to ask more before he hung up. He ended the call in a flash, not even sticking around to hear her say another word.

She stared into space as the busy tone echoed in her ear. She wondered who the woman calling him was.

And why didn't he explain anything to her?

She tossed her phone aside and curled up under the blanket, hugging her pillow tight like a little ball.

It was a reaction of extreme insecurity and a desire to protect herself.

She spent many nights like this as a child, only changing her ways when she learned to defend herself as she grew up.

But now, that old feeling of insecurity seemed to be creeping back and gnawing at her again.

She didn't know how she managed to fall asleep.

When she woke up, it was bright out, and the warm sunlight streamed through the white curtains.

She slowly opened her eyes as she rubbed her temples, only to wake up to a broad, masculine chest.

Ellinor froze. At first, she thought she was dreaming, then instinctively touched the chest in front of her. It felt so real that it gave her chills!

She had just woken up, and her head was still foggy, but she knew that she wasn't home and that her man was out of the country.

So who was this man holding her?

Ellinor's mind raced through all the possibilities until she thought about that boundaryless bloke, Bartlett.

Oh no! He didn't sneak in during the night, did he?

Ellinor was startled by her own thought, then moved to check if her nightgown was still intact under the blanket. But then she realized that she had nothing on. Her nightgown was nowhere to be found!

Things were really messed up!

She sat up abruptly and yelled out in frustration, "Ah!"

"What's wrong?"

The familiar voice and tone made Ellinor pause, then she turned and saw Theo's handsome face in her line of sight. Theo was lying on his side. His handsome face looked a bit tired as he sat up and moved closer

to

her, "What's wrong? Who did you think it was?" Ellinor was still in a state of panic, but she breathed a sigh of relief, "I didn't expect it to be anyone. Waking up with a man next to me is going to startle anyone, right?"

She almost thought that she had betrayed him. Thank goodness she didn't!