

Chapter 2

Tears streamed down from my eyes to my cheeks. I stared at Trevor. His eyes resembled the darkness between white shadows.

My stomach started twisting inside. My hand throbbed where the glass had cut me. I did not know if I was going to lose my hand today, but the disgust in his eyes stabbed my heart.

“Kevin knew Trevor was coming—that’s why he told her to do it.”

“How stupid can she be?”

“Maybe she fell on purpose. Trying to get his attention.”

Laughter rippled through the hall. Their words stung sharper than glass.

"What a bitch! First she bumped into Kevin, and now she wanted to catch Trevor's attention."

The whole hall was whispering about me. I felt like dying in embarrassment. I did not want to get the Kingston brothers' attention. I was only trying to leave silently.

Trevor's leg remained pressed against my hand, as if he was unwilling to move it until he received an answer to his question.

What would I reply to him? Who was I? An ordinary girl who was admitted here with a scholarship, or would I tell him that I was a helpless girl who kept surviving in pain?

The coldness in his eyes frosts my heart. As if something in his gaze kept me staring at him, I did not dare to move my lips.

Someone spoke behind me loudly as the sounds of clicking heels rushed toward me.

“She’s with me.”

Julia’s voice sliced through the whispers like light through fog. I turned my head and saw her standing tall beside Trevor, her chin lifted despite the tension in the air.

"Please let her go. Don't listen to others. She did not have that kind of intention."

Trevor did not look at Julia. I could still feel his gaze on me, unmoved.

“Bro, what's wrong?”

Kevin's voice approached from behind. I turned my head to face him. He looked at his brother and said,

“I was the one who told her to give the bottle.”

Trevor scoffed at him, slowly removing his boot from my hand. It caused me to gasp in pain.

“You are really in the mood to play with me today,” Trevor said to Kevin.

Trevor walked past me, pressing on the broken bottles and crushing them with his shoes. Julia froze, as she could not let out anything before the two brothers.

Kevin moved toward me and got on one knee.

“Just one simple task, and you messed it up,” he said, his smirk returning. “Guess I’ll take that as a debt you owe me, sweetheart.”

Then, leaning close enough that his breath brushed my cheek: “Next time, try not to bring your cheap scent to our parties.”

I bit my lower lip, trying not to let out a cry. Julia cleared her throat. “Please don't bully her. Let her go.”

Kevin raised an eyebrow, turning his head to Julia. “Who is bullying her? She doesn't have the quality to make herself our target.”

Kevin gave my hand a look, got to his feet, and sneered, then went back to Trevor, who was now enjoying the party around girls.

I was sad. His words hurt me.

When Julia noticed me getting up, she helped me.

"Elara, Your hand!" Julia said with a worried tone.

I glanced at my hand and found blood flowing out of my palm and fingers.

"Let's go to the infirmary," Julia said, wrapping my hand around her shoulder.

I limped out of the hall. I needed to check on my legs too. My whole body was burning in pain.

With Julia's help, I reached the infirmary.

The nurse gasped when she saw my hand. “Lie down,” she said quickly.

The bandage wrapped around my palm like a quiet judgment. “You’re lucky,” the doctor said. “No broken bones. But you can’t use your hand for at least a week.”

My world went silent. A week? My audition was tomorrow.

My eyes widened. I shook my head. "No, no. I have to go there. I can't lose this chance."

Julia, who was sitting in a corner, dashed toward me and hugged me. "Elara, calm down."

I held her hand and cried. "What will I do now, Julia? My piano audition..."

The fear and pain were killing me inside. Those men would come to my house again next week. If I did not pay them, they would sell me.

"You still have an option, Elara. Just call Aunt Mary. She is your mom. She will do something."

My mom, Mary Stones, was a beautiful woman who had already moved in a world of wealth and privilege, a world that I both envied and resented.

She had a knack for attracting powerful men, men who showered her with gifts and adoration. I was totally opposite. I only believed in love.

My mom was like a rare flower, always in bloom, always drawing attention.

She always dated wealthy men. Beneath the charm and elegance, I saw a cold calculation.

“No.”

I shook my head in refusal. I refused to call my mom. The last time we met, she told me that she did not have anything to do with dad and me.

I wiped away my tears and exhaled deeply. I remembered the job I had been offered a few days ago. It was from a night club near our university. They needed a young waitress. I came to the conclusion that I would have to join the job.

I left the infirmary and went back home after taking a sick leave from the coffee shop where I worked part-time.

When I entered my house, it was messier than before.

Something hit my mind. I dashed over to my room, forgetting the pain in my leg. I saw my cupboard was broken. With a slow step, I approached it. My hands shook when I found the money in my bag was gone.

I got the money yesterday from my part-time job. I thought about buying groceries for the month, but my father had taken them away. Now how would we live for the whole month?

I closed my eyes, letting the tears fall.

“Moon Goddess,” I whispered, “how long will you test me? My mother left me. My father wants to sell me. When will someone love me?”

Trevor’s face flickered behind my eyelids. My chest tightened.

“But he’s too cold,” I murmured. “He’ll never see me.”

My phone buzzed on the table. I almost didn’t look—until I saw the name.
Mom.

I bit my lip and answered. “M-Mom.”

“Elara, my dear,” she said in her soft, perfect voice.

The sob broke free before I could stop it.

“Are you crying?” she asked gently.

“I’m fine, Mom. How are you?”

A pause. Then, bright and smooth as glass:

“I’m getting married tomorrow. You need to come. I want you to meet your new father... and your brothers.”