

Chapter 5 A Family

The rest of the Crawford brothers narrowed their eyes when they heard Anthony's words.

Gilbert loosened his wrists and cracked his knuckles; Edward, an architectural engineer with a fiery temper and tanned skin, scoffed and grabbed a rebar from nowhere.

"We're law-abiding citizens. How can we openly assault someone in public?" Bryson, the good-natured Captain, said gently. He interjected a nurse nearby and said, "Hello, do you have a gunny sack in the storeroom?"

The nurse stuttered, "Yeah... yeah... we have a polybag and some paper boxes in the pharmacy." She suggested the paper boxes instead, assuming they wanted to store something.

Bryson smiled and said, "Thank you. A gunny sack will be sufficient."

The Crawford brothers thought, *a sack will be useful to beat up someone.*

Meanwhile, Stephen shivered in the cold as he waited outside the VIP wards. He swore in his heart, *I've been up all night, and it's almost daylight. Where the hell are the Crawfords?*

Richard left earlier because he could not stand the cold any longer. He reminded Stephen to stay put and demonstrate their sincerity before he left.

Spring nights were colder than winter nights. Stephen could feel the biting cold filling his lungs with every breath of the stale air. The long wait had also left him hungry and exhausted. All he wanted to do was return home, take a warm, relaxing shower, and sleep the rest of the day away.

Things became even more unbearable when he considered the cozy environment he could be at. Stephen decided it was pointless to wait any longer after another hour had passed.

The man spoke on the phone while walking to the underground car park. "Remember to call me once the Crawfords leave..." Before he could continue, he experienced total darkness surrounding him. He was covered in a gunny sack!

"What the hell! Who are you?" Stephen screamed in agony as his attackers landed forceful punches.

The perpetrators were none other than the eight brothers from the Crawford family. They did not typically get their hands dirty but could not help themselves when they considered Lilly's unfortunate situation. Their resentment grew as they remembered Lilly's body of injuries and how she had cautiously asked if there would be food when she returned home and if they would hurt her.

"Stop it!" Stephen begged. He was helpless and at his captors' mercy. "Do you know who I am? I'm the President of Ador Hatcher Corporation. How dare you attack me! I swear that I'll..."

Anthony scoffed and loosened his tie. He then motioned for his brothers to stop the assault. Everyone complied with his instructions, and Edward clung to the rebar as he prepared to resume the attack.

Stephen heaved a sigh of relief after his opponents appeared to have backed down. However, the rebar landed forcefully on his leg, much to his surprise.

"Ahh!" His agonizing cries rang out throughout the parking lot.

Although Stephen survived the attack, he was injured so badly that he had to be carried into the hospital. What made matters worse was that he had no idea whom was to blame and had no way of finding out. His adversaries did not leave any clues suggesting their identity.

"Are you feeling better, Stephen?" Debbie sobbed beside the man's bedside. If he were awake, he would notice the lack of sincerity in her eyes. The woman appeared to be a worried wife, but she was secretly distraught over Lilly's unexpected newfound identity in the Crawford family.

Debbie was appalled when Paula told her of the news yesterday. She fumed inwardly, *how did that bastard become the only beloved daughter of the Crawford family?!*

In truth, Lilly was not responsible for the miscarriage; Debbie had intentionally caused the fall so that she could get rid of the baby. She knew that the Hatchers were experiencing financial difficulties and that Stephen was on the verge of bankruptcy after incurring numerous debts. Debbie believed that a young and beautiful lady like her had a good chance of finding a new husband; one who was wealthier and more powerful than Stephen. If she had a child, remarriage would be more difficult for her. As a result, she needed to find a way to make the baby vanish while avoiding responsibility.

Debbie knew that Lilly was a lonely child loved by no one. Since her birth, the Hatchers had never been kind to her. Stephen had even admitted in his drunken stupor that he despised her presence. Hence, Debbie felt that it was safe to pin the blame on her lost child on Lilly. Little did she know that the girl was part of the Crawford family.

Debbie's spine tingled at the prospect of offending one of the four greatest families. *What should I do? I'll be in trouble if they find out the truth. I need to figure out how to keep Lilly silent forever...*

At the VIP ward, Lilly opened her eyes once again. This time, the room was completely empty and deathly quiet. She was feeling insecure and uneasy as she thought everyone had left.

A few moments later, there was a soft knock at the door. Her face lit up when she saw Gilbert enter the room. Hugh had instructed them to wait outside the ward in order to avoid crowding the room, and improve ventilation.

"How are you feeling, Lilly? Shall I get you some breakfast?" Gilbert said warmly. When Lilly nodded, he gave the order to serve breakfast.

The rest of the Crawfords were awakened by the noise and went into the room to check on Lilly.

"What do you like to eat, Lilly? There are sandwiches, donuts, oatmeal..." Hugh asked tenderly.

Edward pushed his way in and exclaimed, "How about meatball spaghetti? It's delicious!"

Hugh reprimanded Edward by hitting his leg with his walking cane. "Lilly has only just awoken. How is she going to eat the meatball spaghetti?" He picked up a plate and suggested, "How about some sandwiches? It's tasty."

Bryson smiled as he picked up a bowl. "Or some oatmeal would be good too."

Lilly pursed her lips, and tears shimmered in her eyes. Recognition dawned on her that she may now have a family. She sniffled and said cautiously, "I would like to have some sandwiches, Grandpa."

"Great! Come, have the sandwiches!" Hugh nodded fervently, his tear-reddened eyes fixed on Lilly, who reminded him of a younger Jean.

However, unlike Lilly, Jean was willful and hyperactive when she was a little girl. She led a carefree life and often bickered with her brothers. However, the little girl before him was melancholic, and careful with her words. She must have been through a lot to be this mature at the age of three and a half.

The Crawfords only left the room after Lilly had finished her meal and tucked into bed. However, the moment Lilly closed her eyes, a voice sounded in her ear. "Tulip! Tulip!"

She opened her eyes, but the room was empty. Lilly tried to sleep again, convinced that she was dreaming. The voice spoke again as she closed her eyes. "Lilly, Lilly, Tulip!"

Lilly clutched the sheets nervously as she searched for the source of the voice.