

Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel

Chapter 81

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Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 81

Chapter 81

Chad leered at Stella, his eyes full of sleaze.

When he finally saw her face clearly, he whistled in awe, unable to hold back.

He thought, ‘Damn, she’s gorgeous.

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Her skin was white as snow, her vibe cold as ice; she was drop-dead beautiful, the kind that made him want to claim her for himself.

“Hey, gorgeous...” Chad started.

But before he could finish, Stella flashed him a lazy, icy smile.

Chad was stunned. The next second, he was jolted back to reality by the thunderous roar of the engine.

With a slick, high-stakes drift, the two cars, just moments ago parked side by side, were now nose-to-nose.

The crowd went wild, whistling and cheering nonstop.

Allan was blown away.

He thought, ‘Holy shit, that was intense!

Suddenly, the high beams flashed on, flooding Chad’s Porsche with blinding light.

Chad instinctively raised his hand to shield his eyes and shut them tight.

Stella gripped the wheel with one hand, her other arm dangling out the door of her convertible with a gangster's swagger. The engine roared louder and louder, a cocky smirk curling at her lips.

"Allan," she called out in a calm voice.

"What?" Allan replied, startled.

"Buckle up," Stella said coolly.

"Stella, you..." Allan started, turning to look at her as he fastened his seatbelt. But before he could finish, the brand-new Aston Martin shot forward like an arrow, hurtling straight toward the Porsche's front end.

Chad's eyes went wide in shock, the violent jolt of the car snapping him sober in an instant.

His date in the passenger seat screamed at the top of her lungs.

"Shit!" Chad cursed, voice cracking with panic.

He fumbled for reverse, his legs turning to jelly.

But Stella wasn't backing down. She floored the gas again, keeping the cars nose-to-nose, daring him to flinch.

"Motherfucker, stop the car!" Chad howled, voice breaking as he lost his grip on the wheel.

Stella was still rocking that badass grin, cool and in control from start to finish.

The crowd was losing their minds, everyone looking crazed like they were about to go to war.

"Stop the car!" Chad screamed, his voice cracking with panic.

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Right behind the guardrail was a deadly drop: a cliff so high that one wrong move and he was done for.

The crowd went dead silent.

Allan's heart was pounding so hard it felt like it might jump out of his chest.

Stella gave Allan a casual look, raising an eyebrow.

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Finally, she slammed on the brakes, stopping just in time: right before the Porsche was about to go flying off the cliff.

She threw the car into reverse.

The driver's door of the Aston Martin swung open, and Stella stepped out, her white sneakers hitting the ground first. She strolled over to the convertible Porsche, one hand in her pocket, oozing that lazy, gangster swagger.

She stopped right in front of the Porsche.

Chad was still frozen in the driver's seat, legs shaking so bad he could barely move. The stench in the air said it all: he'd pissed himself, scared out of his mind.

The headlights from both cars blasted her in a flood of light. Stella stood there, cold as ice, dust swirling around her, her chill, outlaw vibe making it impossible to look away.

Stella gave Chad the finger, slow and deliberate, the middle finger aimed dead center at his face.

Her eyes glinted with icy, mocking disdain.

"Better watch how you treat my friend, or next time..." Stella warned, her voice low and dangerous.

She gave a cold, merciless laugh.

She added, "Next time, I'll take your life."

Allan just sat there in the passenger seat, too stunned to speak.

He thought, 'Man, I'm really moved, but I'm way too freaked out to move!

The applause and whistles exploded all around, echoing from every direction. Even folks way out in the back were joining

They thought, ‘That’s a wild rose with thorns: beautiful, but you better not mess with her.

A voice, shocked and disbelieving, called out from the side, “Starfall?”

Stella turned her head with a lazy air and saw Blake, decked out in a tacky Hawaiian shirt and matching shorts.

His fashion sense made her cringe.

“Is that really you?” Blake blurted out, still thinking he must be seeing things.

“All of you, get over here, now!” Blake barked, his voice cutting through the noise.

At his bark, Haliville’s big-name trust-fund brats, who’d been lurking in the corners, shooting the breeze, came strutting out from the shadows.

A dozen or so showed up, all at once.

Every single one was a familiar face from the last time in the club suite.

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“Good evening, Stella,” they called out together, voices full of respect.

Stella was speechless.

She thought, “This is so lame and embarrassing. I just wanna bail right now without even looking back.

Allan stepped out, one hand on the car door, giving those rich kids a raised eyebrow.

Blake did a double-take when he saw Allan, then shot Stella a weird, unreadable look.

Stella stared at him, face blank. She asked, “What’s with that look?”

“Don’t worry, I swear I won’t breathe a word to Mr. Gray,” Blake said, miming a zipper across his lips.

Stella and Allan were speechless.

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“But for real, what are you doing here? Don’t tell me you’re chasing after that Pagani Zonda too?” Blake asked, grinning nosily.

“Too?” Stella echoed.

She lifted her eyes and gave Blake a lazy, unreadable look that sent chills down his spine.

Blake shivered and shrank back, creaped out.

He said, “If you’re here for that Pagani Zonda, just give it up. Look over there.”

He stepped aside, gesturing for Stella to look over.

Stella glanced in the direction he indicated.

It looked like a crew of racers.

Every single one of them looked like they’d just stepped out of a biker gang: mean faces, black tank tops. The guy in front was Liam. He had a nasty scar across his face.

“That’s a crew from Jaffina. They’re known for playing dirty and have never lost a street race. Heard they got paid big bucks just to come here for that Pagani Zonda. See that guy over there?” Blake said, nodding toward the side.

Standing next to the crew was a middle-aged man, probably a bodyguard.

The crew looked like they meant business, dead set on getting their hands on that Pagani Zonda.

Allan frowned, looking grim.

He could sense the danger radiating off the crew.

He thought, ‘These guys are definitely

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Stella’s expression didn’t change at all.

Liam glanced up at Stella, his eyes unreadable.

“Stella, seriously, don’t get in that race. If you want that car, I’ll find another way to get it for you,” Allan said, his voice full of concern.

Normally, he’d let her do whatever crazy thing she wanted, but this was the infamous Death Road, the deadliest stretch of road around.

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With those Jaffina guys hell-bent on winning, even Allan, who’d been racing wild tracks for years, wasn’t sure he could pull it off. No way was he letting Stella risk her life here.

“Damn, you’re really gonna do a street race here?” Blake blurted out, looking like his brain was about to short-circuit.

The Haliville rich kids behind Blake started shouting over each other, all trying to talk Stella out of it. They might be trust- fund brats, but when it came to risking their own lives, they weren’t about to mess around.

Stella was speechless.

She knew they meant well, but damn, they just wouldn’t shut up.

“Starfall, listen to me,” Blake started, reaching out like he was about to sling an arm around her. But suddenly, that familiar icy, killer vibe hit him from across the way. His head snapped up, startled.

He locked eyes with someone nearby.

Blake frozen.

He gulped, throat tight.

The rowdy crowd suddenly fell silent, like someone had hit the mute button: everyone was holding their breath.

“S-Starfall... behind you...” Blake squeaked out, his voice trembling and barely audible.

Stella whipped around, her expression frosty as ever.

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Chapter 82

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The Death Road was lit up like daylight by the headlights, and the fine dust was tinged with a soft glow as it swirled in the light.

The crowd, which had been gathered in small groups to watch the spectacle, now parted like a tide, clearing the way down

the center.

Sebastian, sitting in his wheelchair, came into view for everyone.

His pure black shirt made his flawless, art-like face look even more chiseled and icy. Kindness was never in his nature, and his eyes showed no trace of human emotion. A chill seemed to radiate from his entire body.

In stark contrast, in his arms was Lucas, his eyes red from crying.

Lucas was still wearing his cartoon shark pajamas. His eyes darted around, searching for something, making anyone who saw him feel an overwhelming urge to reach out and comfort him.

Stella's eyes narrowed in shock.

The next moment, she locked eyes with Sebastian, whose presence was as cold as ice.

She watched as he leaned in and murmured something to Lucas.

Lucas, still hiccuping from his sobs, instantly locked onto Stella and stretched his little arms toward her, desperate for comfort.

His face was all pitiful, just like a little kitten left out in the rain.

Allan thought, 'I'm dead.

Allan looked like he'd seen a ghost, barely hanging on, while Blake's legs were shaking so hard they might as well have been made of jelly.

Everyone's eyes were glued to them.

That middle-aged bodyguard, who was with the racer crew, turned ghostly pale the moment he spotted Sebastian. He was freaking out, debating whether to call his boss back in Jaffina right this second.

Before John could even push Sebastian forward, Stella was already striding against the flow of the crowd straight toward them.

Without hesitation, she scooped Lucas out of Sebastian's arms, and Lucas instantly clung to her neck.

Sebastian lowered his cold face, staring at his now empty arms, while Stella was completely focused on Lucas. To everyone else, Sebastian's icy, emotionless vibe made him seem even scarier than before!

Stella raised an eyebrow at Sebastian, surprise flickering in her eyes. She asked, "Why are you here?"

Sebastian paused for a moment, then finally said, "Lucas is looking for you."

Sebastian thought, 'I was just fed up with Lucas's crying, that's all. It's not like I actually had John figure out where she was and come running over.

'I really don't care where she goes tonight.

'And I don't give a damn why she and Allan have lied to me!

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Sebastian looked like a walking ice sculpture, his face carved from pure

Lucas tugged at Stella's shirt, trying to get her attention.

Stella glanced down.

Lucas acted out Sebastian's story with his hands.

He thought, 'Poor little tadpole, it'll never see its mommy again.

Stella turned her head to look at Sebastian.

Sebastian stayed calm and expressionless, just staring back.

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Lucas's eyes were brimming with tears, on the verge of bawling so hard he'd blow snot bubbles.

But then, Sebastian let out a cold, unfiltered laugh. He said, "You're ugly when you cry!"

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Lucas turned his head to look at Sebastian, his neck moving stiffly like a little robot that hadn't been oiled in ages.

Lucas burst into tears again.

He swung his fists at Sebastian.

“Ugly,” Sebastian repeated coldly, not holding back at all.

Lucas protested.

Stella was speechless.

Blake couldn't hold back a snort, but the next second, both Sebastian and Lucas turned their heads in perfect sync to stare at him, their eyes as cold as if they were looking at a dead man.

Blake frozen.

Just then, a whistle blew in the distance.

Seizing the chance to change the subject, Blake quickly said, “Stella, you should go sign up.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, he wanted to smack himself.

He cursed inwardly, ‘Damn, my stupid mouth.’

‘Seriously, of all the things to say, I had to bring up the one thing nobody wants to talk about.

Allan was too scared to speak.

“Hold him,” Stella said, plopping Lucas back into Sebastian's arms, then sauntered off toward the crowd like she didn't have a care in the world.

Lucas, back in Sebastian's arms, gave a babyish huff

He turned his chubby face away from Sebastian with a dramatic little pout, acting way too proud to even look at him.

Sebastian called out, “Allan.

“I was wrong!” Allan blurted out. With a thud, his legs gave out, and he folded himself into a low crouch in front of Sebastian, shoulders crumpling like crumpled paper.

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Everyone stared at him, stunned.

Allan thought, ‘Lucas, when you get older, you’ll learn there are some problems in this world that pride just can’t solve.

Sebastian pressed, “What did you do wrong?” His face was cold and morbid, not a trace of warmth in his eyes. His long fingers coldly rolled his prayer beads, turning the atmosphere into pure hell.

“I shouldn’t have mentioned the street race in front of Stella, and I definitely shouldn’t have brought up the Pagani Zonda, and I really shouldn’t have...” Allan said, his voice shaking with fear.

Allan was still rambling on, but Lucas suddenly remembered something and tugged at Sebastian’s shirt with his hand.

Sebastian glanced down at him.

Lucas scrambled around in Sebastian’s arms, pulled out his phone, and started poking at the screen with his tiny fingers.

He typed: [Stella asked me what you like.]

Sebastian’s gaze turned even colder and more intense.

Suddenly, Allan cried out.

Sebastian turned his head and shot him a chilling glare.

“Wait, so Stella’s actually trying to win that Pagani Zonda for you?” Allan blurted out, totally floored.

Allan finally caught on, but he was still totally baffled.

He’d always thought Stella was just here for the thrill of it, messing around. He thought, ‘So she is doing all this for Sebastian?’

Just then, Stella strolled back over after signing up.

Everyone turned to look at her.

Stella thought, ‘Why are they all staring at me like that? What happened?’

“Stella,” Allan choked up, his eyes brimming with tears.

Stella bent down out of habit and pulled the black blanket back up over Sebastian’s knees.

“Starfall, those guys are seriously dangerous,” Blake warned.

Blake might act like he doesn’t care about anything, but when it came to his friends, he always had their backs. He was a regular at the Death Road, and usually, there’d be at least a hundred cars in the race.

But today, there were fewer than thirty cars total.

Everyone knew the crew from Jaffina was totally reckless. They didn’t care if they lived or died, and every one of them was at killer.

They’d do anything to get their hands on that Pagani Zonda, no matter the cost.

“Got it,” Stella replied, not even fazed, and gave Lucas’s chubby cheek a sneaky squeeze.

“If other curves are a 10 on the danger scale, the Death Road is a straight-up 1000!” Allan added, practically begging Stella to listen.

The Death Road was infamous for its sixteen back-to-back hairpin turns, making it Haliville’s biggest nightmare for the

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traffic department. It had claimed more lives than anyone could count.

“Come on, Sebastian, talk some sense into her!” Allan pleaded, practically begging.

Allan had talked himself hoarse, but Stella didn’t budge an inch.

Stella looked at Sebastian and asked, “Are you gonna try to stop me, too?”

Allan frantically shot Sebastian a series of desperate winks, practically begging him to do something.

The next second, Sebastian reached out his hand to Stella.

When Allan saw what was in Sebastian's palm, his heart sank.

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Stella looked laid-back, but with Lucas around, her eyes held a chill and a hint of defiance.

A car key just sat quietly in Sebastian's palm.

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“The Aston Martin's not made for these roads. This one's way better for you,” Sebastian said, his face cold and voice flat, like he was just handing over a pen.

Allan protested inwardly, ‘Hey, my car's been tricked out to the max too, you know.

Is he hyping up his car just to trash mine? Shameless.’

Stella gave Sebastian a lazy look. From her angle, she could see the curve of his impossibly long lashes: chill and handsome in a way even Sebastian probably didn't realize.

After a moment, Sebastian noticed Stella wasn't taking the key, so he looked up.

His face was dark and brooding.

"Thanks," Stella said, without missing a beat as she reached out.

But just as her hand neared the key, Sebastian's cold, strong hand suddenly closed around hers, locking both her hand and the key in his grip.

Everyone stared at them, stunned.

Lucas huffed, giving Sebastian a look of pure annoyance.

Sebastian didn't even glance at anyone else, his eyes clouded over for a moment before he finally let go.

With the key in hand, Stella raised her hand and pressed the button.

Not far away, a silver-gray Lamborghini Veneno convertible beeped as it unlocked, its lights flashing on. The custom, streamlined body looked absolutely killer.

Stella recognized it as Sebastian's very first prize ride.

Stella walked over to the car.

Sebastian's eyes were so cold they could freeze one solid, tracking Stella's every move. He watched as she leaned one hand on the silver-gray door, casually checking out the inside. Suddenly, she asked, "Wanna come along?"

Stella arched an eyebrow, a playful glint in her eyes, and reached her hand out to Sebastian.

This Lamborghini Veneno wasn't just a car to Sebastian. It was something truly special.

Stella thought, 'He must really miss this old beast.'

Allan's eyes widened in shock.

He thought, 'Has Stella totally lost it?'

'Is she seriously asking Sebastian to ride shotgun?'

John, who'd been quietly blending into the background, suddenly had a dramatic change of expression. Before he could say a word to stop Sebastian, Sebastian plopped Lucas right into his arms.

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"Okay," Sebastian replied, his voice husky and even lower than usual.

Allan thought, 'Seriously?'

'One dares to invite, the other dares to accept.'

"They have all lost their minds.'"

Sebastian maneuvered his electric wheelchair right up to Stella.

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Street races didn't have all those strict official rules, so having a passenger was fair game. But he was surprised Sebastian would agree.

"Screw it. I'm signing up, too. I'll risk my life to keep Stella safe," Blake suddenly shouted, spinning around and heading straight for the registration booth.

The rich kids behind Blake exchanged glances, then, not wanting to be left out, they all rushed after Blake to sign up too.

Allan thought, 'If even these rich kids are jumping in, there's no way I'm staying behind. Screw it! So what if they're from Jaffina?'

'Here in Haliville, it's all about skill!'

As if he'd finally made up his mind, Allan turned and headed straight for the sign-up desk.

Not far away, the middle-aged bodyguard watched the chaos unfold, his brows knitted tight. Finally, he dialed his boss back in Jaffina.

The call went through almost immediately.

“Did we win?” an elegant woman’s voice asked from the other end.

“It hasn’t started yet, but...” the bodyguard replied, trailing off.

The bodyguard reluctantly filled her in on what happened, putting extra emphasis on Sebastian’s name.

There was a long silence on the other end.

After a long moment, the woman said, “I don’t care what it takes or what you have to do. I want that car. Make it happen.”

The bodyguard hesitated, “But, Sebas-”

“I said, do whatever it takes,” the woman cut him off, then hung up without another word.

The bodyguard turned to Liam and made a slashing motion across his throat.

Liam let out a cold laugh.

Oply ninety seconds left before the race officially kicked off!

At the starting line of Death Road, dozens of souped-up rides were lined up, engines growling and the crowd’s cheers exploding all around.

The whole place buzzed with that wild, reckless energy that hit right before the rush of speed and adrenaline.

Inside the Lamborghini, Stella rested her forehead on her hand, turning to look at Sebastian in the passenger seat. The shifting lights carved out his perfect features, making him seem cold as ancient ice, untouched by anything human.

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He radiated pure danger, like getting close was flirting with something lethal.

Catching Stella looking his way, Sebastian locked eyes with her.

Their eyes met for a split second, and Stella broke into a lazy grin. She said, "Sebastian, trust me."

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She adjusted the rearview mirror, her words just as chill as her smile, making Sebastian's gaze deepen even more.

The countdown officially began.

A bombshell race girl stood in front of the lineup, a flag in each hand.

She was blowing kisses to the crowd without a care.

In the crowd, John was holding a Lucas in his arms, his eyes glued to Sebastian, nerves on edge. Worried something might go wrong, he'd already called his crew from Sandridge Island for backup

Stella slammed the gas pedal, expressionless.

The speedometer needle shot up, tires screeched against the pavement, and thick white smoke billowed out. The burnouts had the crowd going wild.

The flag girl dropped her flags, and the whole lineup exploded off the starting line.

The insane centrifugal force sent Stella's adrenaline into overdrive, her face half-hidden in shadow as that outlaw edge in her finally broke loose. In just seconds, the speedometer hit 180 mph, and a wicked, dangerous grin curled on her lips.

Sebastian just sat there in the passenger seat, cool and collected, his eyes never leaving Stella for a second.

Even with nothing but a cliff beyond the guardrail, this wild, out-of-control madness didn't shake him at all. He was ice-cold, like nothing in the world could touch him.

Death Road was shaped like a twisted square loop, a real maze for racers.

Sixteen back-to-back turns, and one'd end up right back at the starting line, if one survived the ride.

"Stella, floor it!" Blake's crew rolled down their windows, shouting at the top of their lungs.

With Blake leading the charge, a dozen cars lined up behind Stella in a tight formation, daring anyone to mess with her.

Whenever someone tried to pull a dirty trick on Stella, those rich kids would ram their own cars in the way without a second thought.

view mirror.

Stella saw everything through the

Her eyes grew even darker, a storm brewing in their depths.

They hadn't even reached the deadliest stretch: the sixteen back-to-back turns, and already, Blake was the last one standing.

"Starfall, tell me: am I the coolest guy out here or what?" Blake called out, swaggering as he rolled down his window.

Right behind him, the Jaffina crew with their custom logos came up hard and dirty, smashing into his rear bumper three times in a row. The trunk was crushed so badly that his car was basically totaled.

The next second, Stella rolled down her window.

A faint, chilly smile flickered across her pretty face as she shot Blake a thumbs-up.

"Starfall, you fucking better win this for your boy!" Blake yelled, pounding both fists on the steering wheel.

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His car, engine totaled, sat dead by the roadside. The adrenaline rush was so intense that tears streamed down his face, totally out of control.

Blake thought, ‘Holy shit, that was intense.’

But this was as far as their skills could take her; now it was all up to Stella.

Up ahead, the entrance to the deadliest stretch of Death Road; the infamous sixteen back-to-back turns, was right in front of

them.

Stella and Sebastian both knew exactly what was coming.

The real danger was only just beginning.

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Chapter 84

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With a deafening crash, the passenger seat where Sebastian sat was slammed by a souped-up Ferrari that had pulled up out of nowhere, throwing down a challenge.

The whole car rocked violently.

Stella called out, “Sebastian.” Her voice flared with anger as she instantly turned to him.

Sebastian looked clean-cut and elegant, totally unfazed. His sickly handsome face was half-hidden in the shadows, making it hard to read his expression. “I’m fine,” he said, not a hint of emotion in his voice.

It was obvious the other guy’s stunt didn’t faze him one bit.

But Stella was furious.

She let out a mocking laugh, licking her lips. Her gaze was stained with a fierce red, radiating danger and mischief.

She thought, ‘They should count themselves lucky they didn’t manage to hurt Sebastian.

‘But that doesn’t mean I am about to let them off easy.

With a thunderous roar, Stella slammed her foot down on the gas, pushing the car’s already insane 180 mph speed even higher.

Once she’d put some distance between herself and the souped-up Ferrari, a cold smirk tugged at her lips. She slammed on the brakes, dropping her speed instantly.

Then, at the last wide stretch of road, she pulled off a jaw-dropping 360-degree drift, spinning her car around and gunning it straight back at the Ferrari.

The other driver sucked in a sharp breath.

He thought, 'Is this maniac for real?'

His instincts kicked in, and he jerked the wheel hard to the left to avoid Stella. But when he realized there was a sheer cliff on that side, it was already way too late.

The arrogant, tricked-out Ferrari smashed straight through the guardrail and went flying off the cliff.

With a deafening boom, a fireball lit up the night sky.

Good thing the driver managed to jump out at the very last second.

Allan, trailing behind and witnessing the whole scene, was utterly stunned.

Goosebumps broke out all over him. After all his years tearing up the racetrack, this was the first time a rush had ever sent shivers down his spine and made his scalp tingle.

He couldn't even begin to imagine what kind of wild, jaw-dropping spectacle that must've looked like from Stella and Sebastian's point of view.

"Liam!" A frantic shout burst through the Jaffina crew's radio.

Liam's expression turned grim, his eyes full of menace. He snapped, "I'm not fucking blind!"

He never expected to run into a psycho like Stella tonight.

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"Her weak spot is that dead weight in the passenger seat, the guy in the wheelchair!" Liam spat, his tone cold and ruthless.

"Everyone, target the passenger side. I don't care what it takes. Make sure I cross that finish line first!" he snarled.

Their employer was from one of Jaffina's most powerful families. If Liam could help him win this car, he'd pocket an extra twenty million on top of his cut. Losing wasn't an option; he'd rather die than let that happen.

Death Road had sixteen killer hairpin turns, split into two sections: the first eight were wide but dangerously steep, while the last eight were so tight they could eat one alive, all thanks to the brutal terrain.

The Jaffina crew was putting all their dirty tricks to work right in those first eight bends.

Allan was the first to realize something was seriously wrong.

He rolled down his window and shouted at the top of his lungs, “Sebastian, watch out!”

He could only watch helplessly as the Jaffina crew risked everything, gunning straight for the passenger side where Sebastian sat, like they’d zeroed in on Stella’s Achilles’ heel.

Allan slammed down the gas, trying to catch up.

Inside the Lamborghini, Stella sat with her eyes cast down, her face cold and unreadable. Her gaze seemed stained with crimson, icy to the core; every inch of her screamed danger.

“Guess I forgot to answer you earlier,” Sebastian said, his face blank, but his voice pulled Stella back from the edge just in time.

Moments ago, she’d had murder in her eyes.

Stella cooled her icy edge and asked, “What?”

Sebastian said, “I trust you.”

The dim glow from the dashboard lit up his face, making his devilishly handsome features look almost unreal: haunting, hypnotic, and untouched by the chaos outside.

He seemed completely unfazed by the danger, his eyes like pools of midnight ink, deep and unreadable.

Stella was momentarily speechless.

She thought, ‘Man, he really takes his sweet time to catch on.

She glanced down, let out a low laugh, and slammed on the gas. She said “They got it all wrong. You in the passenger seat? That’s not my weakness.”

Stella's eyes flashed coldly as she yanked the wheel, pulling off a reckless drift.

The souped-up car aiming for Sebastian got shoved right in front of her, grinding along the guardrail by the cliff at insane speed, a trail of sparks lighting up the night.

Stella said, "If you weren't here, they'd all be dead tonight."

She said it with a chill so deep, it was like she didn't care at all.

Outside, sparks flew as the car scraped along the guardrail, but inside, Stella's eyes were devoid of warmth, like she was born cold and ruthless, made of ice and stone.

The screech of tires ripping across the asphalt echoed through the bend, the sound of death itself.

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"They should thank you," Stella said, her voice cold as ice, not a hint of mercy.

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At this insane speed, Stella returned to her cool, effortless control. Her foot worked the gas and clutch in perfect sync, and the speedometer jumped to 217 mph in a heartbeat, the kind of speed where one was flirting with death every second.

One slip, and it was game over: totaled car, dead bodies.

The Jaffina crew were all street-racing veterans, but even they felt a chill run down their spines as Stella pushed the limits, as if she had a death wish.

It was psychological warfare: she was in their heads, making them doubt themselves.

Outside, the scenery whipped by in a blur of speed. Sebastian sat quietly, his gaze locked on Stella.

As the shifting light played over his face, that usual icy aloofness faded, replaced by a sharp, almost obsessive focus, like the cold walls he'd built around himself were finally starting to crack.

He was dangerously handsome: his features so perfect it was almost unfair, like he'd been sculpted by the gods just to make everyone else look plain.

Stella tore through the swarm of cars trying to box her in, weaving S-curves with deadly precision like she owned the road.

Crashes and explosions echoed all around her, and every time she whipped around a corner, her tires smoked and screeched, leaving trails of burning rubber.

She was so fast, it was straight-up terrifying, like she was flirting with death and loving every second of it.

Liam barked, "Bunch of fucking idiots!" He slammed his fist on the wheel, shooting a glare to the side. His eyes went wide, then narrowed in disbelief.

The deafening roar of an engine was suddenly right next to him. The Lamborghini his crew had been trying to pin down was now in his sights, like it had just materialized out of nowhere.

A bunch of Haliville's most notorious rich kids were gathered around the finish line, the crowd buzzing with anticipation as everyone waited anxiously for the results.

"Damn it, every single bet over there is on the Jaffina crew to win!" one of the rich kids grumbled, coming back from a stroll and looking pissed.

He thought, 'Not a single person thinks Stella stands a chance?'

"Anyone got any money?" someone called out.

Blake, so nervous he was practically pulling his hair out, didn't even think twice. He whipped out his wallet and threw a fat wad of cash at the guy. The rest quickly followed suit, and in no time, they'd pooled together several grand.

"Put it all on Stella!" Blake ordered, not a shred of hesitation in his voice.

"Blake, have you lost your mind?" came a chorus of jeers from the crowd, the mockery loud and clear.

Blake didn't even bother to look their way. He just slammed down a fat stack of cash, cool as ever.

To the rest of the onlookers, Blake and his crew looked like they were begging to be called idiots.

"They're coming!" someone yelled, their voice slicing through the crowd and sending a ripple of excitement.

The roar of engines thundered closer and closer. The betting crowd went wild, craning their necks and straining to see who'd cross the finish line first, hearts pounding with anticipation.

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Chapter 84

A babe was waving a flag and busting out some wild dance moves, getting everyone fired up at the finish line.

55 vouchers

"Who is it? Who's ahead? Who's winning?" The rich kids were shouting over each other, voices cracking with excitement and

nerves.

They were on the edge of their seats, wishing they had eagle eyes and radar ears to catch the result before anyone else.

"Stop shoving, I can't see anything!" someone shouted, their voice full of annoyance.

"Who is it? Who's in the lead?" another yelled, barely able to hold back their excitement.

In the distance, two sports cars came into view, neck and neck as they raced toward the finish line at breakneck speed.

The crowd's adrenaline spiked, and everyone was on edge as the showdown unfolded.

Victory was right there, just inches away. Either car could snatch the win at any second.

The middle-aged bodyguard frowned, gazing into the distance. He couldn't shake the feeling that something bad was about to happen.

The very next second, the two sports cars shot across the finish line, barely a split second apart.

"Stella, you're a total badass!" Everyone lost it, screaming her name at the top of their lungs.

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Chapter 85

55 vouchers

The moment Stella crossed the finish line, Blake and his gang of Haliville rich kids erupted in cheers that shook the sky.

Blake shouted, "Hell yeah! Queen Stella kicks ass! We won!"

Lucas, snuggled in John's arms, threw his hands up just like everyone else.

His big, sparkling eyes were full of admiration.

John grumbled inwardly, 'Kid, you really don't have to copy everything they do!

In stark contrast to their excitement were the stunned, can't-believe-their-eyes stares from the rest of the crowd.

They checked again and again, but the first car across the finish line was still that silver-gray Lamborghini Veneno, its front end nearly totaled.

They thought, 'Did the Jaffina crew really just lose?'

After a moment of stunned silence, the crowd exploded with deafening screams at the unexpected upset.

At the same time, the door of the Lamborghini Veneno swung open.

Stella stepped out in her white sneakers, still rocking that lazy, streetwise vibe. She leaned one hand on the silver-gray door,

gaze

cold as ice as she stared down the car behind her.

her

Blake was ugly-crying as he ran toward Stella, looking like a giant goofball. He called out, “Stella!”

Before Blake could get close, Stella was already striding toward Liam as he got out of his car, looking totally defeated.

“Stella?” Blake blurted out, totally stunned.

Sebastian was already back in his wheelchair, watching Stella’s cold, badass figure walk away. She was like a rare flower on a mountaintop: aloof and irresistibly captivating.

John respectfully handed Lucas over to Sebastian, sensing that Sebastian was in a good mood.

“Are they all here?” Sebastian suddenly asked, his face expressionless as he glanced into the shadows.

John’s scalp tingled. He replied, “Yes.”

All the guys from Sandridge Island were now scattered in the shadows.

They’d all witnessed Stella’s epic finish.

Meanwhile, Liam got out of his car, looking totally defeated.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed someone approaching and looked up.

Stella swaggered over with reckless confidence, her beautiful face chill and sharp, a faint, indifferent smile curling at her lips.

She lifted her hand behind her head and slowly pulled out her hairpin, spinning it into a flower shape between her slender fingers. Her lowered lashes were frosted with cold.

Her hair cascaded down her back like a midnight waterfall.

Everyone was absolutely floored by how gorgeous she looked.

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Chapter 85

55 vouchers

Liam stared as Stella swaggered closer, her image sharpening in his eyes. Thinking back to the wild race just now, for the first time, he actually felt a shiver.

The next second, Stella's smile vanished, and in a flash, she stabbed the sharp tip of her hairpin straight at Liam's left eye.

Liam's pupils contracted in shock.

He screamed out of fear.

The crowd gasped, everyone frozen by the sudden move. Just as the hairpin was about to hit Liam's eye, Sebastian, sitting in his wheelchair, cold as ice, spoke up.

"Stella," Sebastian called out.

The instant his voice rang out, Stella froze, her hairpin hovering a millimeter from Liam's eyeball.

Allan had just pulled up at the finish line, stepped out of his car, and saw the whole thing go down.

Stella spoke in a voice just above a whisper, meant only for Liam, her eyes flicking coldly toward Sebastian as she did.

Blake crouched beside Sebastian, wiping his excited tears away with his sleeve. He asked, "What did Stella say?"

Sebastian, Lucas, and John all glanced over at him.

They thought, 'When did this dork sneak over?'

Lucas tilted his head with a smug look and tugged at Sebastian's sleeve. He grabbed Sebastian's phone and started tapping away on the screen with his tiny fingers.

When he finished, he handed it to Sebastian.

The message read: [Stella said, 'If he gets hurt, you're dead.']

Allan had just walked back, head down, only to get hit by a brutal wave of PDA.

He thought, 'My damn legs are still shaking. Can someone show a little respect for the actual single dog here?'

Sebastian watched Stella in silence, his gaze cool and distant. No matter the angle, he was drop-dead gorgeous. For once, a faint, almost imperceptible smile flickered across his icy face.

But it vanished in an instant.

Blake scratched his head, thinking, 'Did I just see something? Should I take another look?'

He looked up, only to meet Sebastian's eyes of doom.

Blake thought, 'Guess I really am seeing things.'

With a lazy flick of her wrist, Stella withdrew her hand and sauntered back toward Sebastian.

Behind her, Liam's legs buckled under the weight of it all, and he crumpled to the ground.

He didn't doubt for a second that if Sebastian hadn't called out, Stella would've gouged out his eye, no hesitation. In her gaze, he saw cold-blooded intent to kill.

Stella strode into the night breeze, her wavy hair lifting behind her, dust swirling in the car lights like soft gold. Her porcelain face was unreadable, not a ripple of emotion.

As soon as Lucas saw Stella coming over, he instantly reached out to her.

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Chapter 85

Sebastian just stared, stone-faced.

26

55 Vouchers

He watched as Stella picked Lucas up from his arms like it was nothing, and his eyes, already dark, turned even stormier.

“Stella, you’re a legend!” Blake yelled, springing to his feet.

The other rich kids, hugging their bags of cash, were hollering like maniacs. They’d tossed in a few grand and just scored a million!

“Stella, here, it’s all yours!” Blake said, thrusting the bag into her hands.

Sebastian, whose face was already looking grim, watched as Stella still hadn’t spared him a single glance. His strikingly handsome, pale face grew even gloomier.

“You guys use it for the car repairs,” Stella said, not even bothering to claim the prize. Holding Lucas in one arm, careful not to let her hairpin poke the little guy, she casually passed the hairpin to Sebastian.

Sebastian glanced over.

He took it, and his face finally eased up a notch.

“Don’t sweat it, our cars are all insured!” Blake said, flashing that classic rich kid grin.

Honestly, the more one hung around Blake and his crew, the less obnoxious they seemed.

“Just take it and quit whining!” Stella said, laid-back as ever. She gave Lucas’s cheeks a gentle squeeze, all that tough-girl vibe from earlier with Liam totally gone.

“Thanks, Stella!” the rich kids shouted at the top of their lungs.

Stella was speechless.

She thought, ‘Can’t they just shut up?’

“Stella, my grandpa wants to take you out to dinner. He wants to thank you for helping me out last time,” Blake said, scratching his head, clearly feeling awkward.

Just bringing up Kendrick made Blake squirm even more. He said, “I know I messed up before. Can you take me off your WhatsApp blacklist?”

Lucas and Sebastian turned to glare at Blake in perfect sync.

Sebastian was all dark and brooding.

Lucas puffed up his cheeks, looking totally miffed.

“Got it,” Stella said lazily, and right in front of Blake, she pulled him off her blacklist, no hesitation, no drama.

“I’ll go grab your car keys!” Blake called out, flashing a big goofy grin as he dashed off.

Allan coughed awkwardly.

When Stella glanced over, he pointed at Sebastian.

Stella looked confused.

Suddenly, Blake’s shout echoed from across the lot, “What the hell are you doing?”

He’d barely gotten his hands on the Pagani Zonda keys before the middle-aged bodyguard swooped in and snatched them

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Chapter 86

Stella's eyes turned cold.

26

55 vouchers

With a deadpan face, she shoved Lucas back into Sebastian's arms. When she looked up again, her gaze was defiant and a little wild.

She kept a tight lid on her impatience, but the dangerous glint and faint redness at the corners of her eyes gave her away.

Blake, who'd never been treated like this in his life, lunged to snatch the car keys back.

But the middle-aged bodyguard just stared at him with cold contempt, not even bothering to acknowledge him. With sharp crack, both of Blake's arms were dislocated.

Blake screamed in agony.

As he did it, the bodyguard didn't even blink, his eyes fixed on Stella. His stare was pure intimidation, a silent threat.

The bodyguard started walking toward Stella.

Behind him, his men hauled Blake up by the collar, dragging him along like he was nothing but a beaten mutt.

"Mr. Gray," John murmured.

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Sebastian's face was unreadable. His hand, strung with black prayer beads, twitched ever so slightly, and in the shadows, everyone readied themselves, waiting for his signal.

The middle-aged bodyguard stepped forward and stood directly in front of Stella.

He said, "Alright, Miss, how much do you want for the car?"

His words sounded polite enough, but the message was clear: this was a shakedown, and she didn't really have a choice.

He obviously didn't see Stella as worth his attention, but when his gaze shifted to Sebastian, there was a strange, unreadable look in his eyes.

At first, Stella didn't say a word.

She gave the bodyguard a lazy look, barely bothering to lift her eyes.

That single look made the bodyguard's pupils contract, and he instinctively took half a step back.

Just now, he'd felt a chill run down his spine. Danger was in the air.

"Let him go," Stella said, licking her lips with a hint of defiance. Her tone was impossible to read: cold, flat, giving nothing away.

She gave a lazy wave toward Blake, who was hissing in pain and struggling to catch his breath.

"Just name your price, Miss," the bodyguard said, forcing himself to stay calm as he shot a quick signal to his crew.

"Stella, don't listen to him. Forget about me, I'm good... Ow!" Blake yelled, his voice strained with pain.

Cold sweat broke out all over his pale face.

Even Allan, who was always the laid-back, nothing-bothers-me type, dropped his usual smirk. He fixed a cold, serious look

the

guys across from him.

on

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Chapter 86

Allan couldn't shake the feeling that he'd seen this bodyguard somewhere before.

55 vouchers

Stella glanced back at Sebastian, her face cool and detached.

Without a word, Sebastian, expression blank, reached out and covered Lucas's eyes.

The bodyguard's smile was still frozen on his face when, in a blink, everything went dark. Stella was suddenly right in front of Blake, moving like a phantom. Her slender, pale fingers locked tight around the throat of the guy who locked Blake.

With a vicious twist, she wrenched his neck.

Blake felt the grip on him vanish.

The bodyguard who'd been dragging him like a stray mutt dropped to his knees, clutching his throat in agony, and spat a mouthful of blood onto the ground.

Blake frozen.

His

eyes

went wide. He was so shocked that he didn't even feel the pain in his busted arms anymore.

Now Blake was sure of it: back at South District Precinct, Stella really had gone easy on him.

Dead silence hung in the air. Everyone else was still too shocked to snap out of it.

Stella didn't even look at anyone else. She just gave Blake a lazy wave.

With a heavy thud, Blake, who'd looked ready to die before he'd ever yielded to the bodyguard, folded forward, forehead almost grazing the floor at her feet. He said, "Stella, I was wrong!"

He did it so smoothly, it almost made one feel sorry for him, like he'd practiced this move way too many times.

Everything fell instantly quiet.

Lucas, whose eyes were still covered by Sebastian, looked lost.

“Like hell you were wrong. Get up!” Stella snapped, her voice tight with barely contained anger.

Her face was blank, but to everyone else, she looked downright vicious.

Blake scrambled to his feet.

Before he could even take a few steps away from the bodyguard who’d just coughed up blood, he heard two crisp, snapping sounds right by his ear.

He stared blankly at Stella standing across from him, then glanced down at his hands. Just moments ago, they were busted, but now they moved like nothing had happened.

Blake was still trying to figure out what had just happened.

He was still in a daze when he shuffled back to Sebastian’s side.

Blake thought, ‘Did Stella just pop my arms back in place?’

‘But when did she do it?’

With Blake out of the way, Stella stared down the middle-aged bodyguard, her eyes like ice, daring him to defy her. She stretched out her hand, palm up, slow and deliberate. She said, “The keys.”

Stella thought, “That Pagani Zonda is meant for Sebastian; no one else gets a say in it.’

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Chapter 86

“No matter how much it costs...” The bodyguard finally found his voice again, trying to negotiate.

Stella cut him off before he could finish. She said, “The keys!”

She fixed him with an icy, deadly stare.

26

55 vouchers

The man beside the bodyguard pointed his finger right in Stella's face and snapped, "Don't push your luck. Do you know..." but before he could finish, he suddenly screamed in pain.

Stella's face stayed blank as she stared at the middle-aged bodyguard. With chilling ease, she caught the guy's finger in her cold, pale hand.

She repeated, "Give me the keys."

With every word she spoke, another finger snapped, one after another. By the end, only one finger on his hand was left working.

Stella dipped her head, a cold, dangerous smirk tugging at her lips.

The last finger snapped with a wet crack.

In the shadows, someone asked, "Ivan, are you sure she's the one you called just a useless showpiece? The one you said couldn't even lift a finger?"

"She's way tougher than any of us."

The chilly night breeze dried the cold sweat on his forehead, but Ivan still felt a shiver run down his spine.

The middle-aged bodyguard locked eyes with Stella, his throat tightening as he swallowed nervously.

He shot a look at Sebastian, who was sitting in his wheelchair. Something seemed to click for him, and he started heading straight for Sebastian.

Stella's eyes darkened, turning ice-cold. She casually stepped to the side, planting herself right in his path, making it clear he wasn't getting past her.

In a flash, Allan stared at the middle-aged bodyguard's face. He finally remembered who this guy was, and his expression changed instantly.

Before Allan could say a word, the bodyguard had already announced his background.

"Mr. Gray, I'm from the Everhart family in Jaffina," the bodyguard said, his voice steady and formal.

The bodyguard had thought that there was no way anyone could ever take down the team from Jaffina. That Pagani Zonda was already as good as his.

But things had veered off the script in his head; he had no choice left but to drop the mask and show who he really was.

Stella arched a brow and thought, ‘The Everhart family?’

‘Never heard of them.’

The moment those words left the bodyguard’s mouth, the air around Sebastian turned lethal. His killing intent surged like a storm, ready to devour everyone in its path.

Stella turned around.

Sebastian’s pale, dangerously handsome face was shrouded in a cold, violent vibe. He looked like a lunatic barely holding it together, ready to snap at any moment.

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Chapter 86

Even Lucas, in his arms, couldn’t help but fidget, picking up on his dark mood.

E55 vouchers

“Mr. Gray, our lady wants to give this car to her son as a birthday present,” the bodyguard said, his voice still calm but tinged with arrogance.

“That’s enough. Shut your mouth,” Allan snapped, his expression cold and furious, his aura just as menacing.

“We hope you can let...” the bodyguard began, his voice tinged with smugness.

But before he could finish, he felt something swiped from his waist, and a second later, cold metal was pressed to the back of

his head.

Stella kept her eyes lowered, face blank, and her voice was cold as ice. She demanded, “Let what?”

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Chapter 87

26

55 vouchers

“Stop!” The bodyguards with the middle-aged man all drew their guns from their waists in perfect sync, aiming straight at

Stella.

Almost instantly, figures stepped out from the shadows, guns raised, targeting the bodyguards.

Blake and the playboys from Haliville were all stunned.

They were flanked by men on both sides, nowhere to run. They had no choice but to crouch down, hands over their heads.

“When someone tells you to shut up, you shut your mouth,” Stella said, not even flinching with all those guns aimed at her. “That’s just common courtesy.”

Stella really couldn’t stand people who were so full of themselves and didn’t know their place.

Allan shot a worried glance at Sebastian, his brow furrowed.

The middle-aged bodyguard sneered, “Miss, don’t go thinking you’re hot stuff just because you picked up a few tricks from TV. You even know which end of the gun to point?”

He scoffed to himself, ‘Bet she can’t even load the damn thing!’

Blake instinctively brushed the cropped hair by his ear, a look of pride flashing across his face. If anyone knew the answer to that, it was him. In his mind, he cackled like a classic villain.

‘You clueless geezer, your time’s up!’ Blake wondered.

As if answering the middle-aged bodyguard, there was a sharp click right behind his head.

Stella had just chambered a round.

The middle-aged bodyguard’s swallow was so loud that it cut through the tension. For the first time, he actually looked rattled. This was way beyond what anyone had bargained for.

“Don’t you dare!” one of the middle-aged bodyguard’s men shouted.

Stella took her sweet time sizing them up, and that slow, deliberate look sent chills down everyone’s spine.

Without a hint of emotion, Stella raised her silenced gun and popped him right in the shoulder. Then she threw him a taunting smile. “Tell me, do you still think I wouldn’t dare?”

Everyone was stunned.

7

Only Sebastian seemed completely frozen, his whole vibe cold enough to make your skin crawl.

Lost in his own shadowy, messed-up thoughts, Sebastian was finally snapping back to reality, but even sitting there in that black wheelchair, he looked like a block of ice, totally untouchable

“Garrett!” one of the bodyguard’s men yelled, his eyes blazing with panic. Things were about to go off the rails.

“Shut up!” Garrett, the middle-aged bodyguard, clutched his bleeding right shoulder, biting back the pain. With his free hand, he pulled out the car keys and raised them over his head. “Hand me my gun.”

Garrett realized they’d just messed with a real tough customer this time.

If they didn’t back off now, they might not walk out of Haliville in one piece.

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Chapter 87

Stella kept that slow, deliberate swagger as she circled around to stand right in front of Garrett.

55 vouchers

She lifted her arm. Then, without hesitation, she fired several shots up into the sky. She didn’t show a hint of emotion.

Only after Stella had fired off every last round did she fling the gun back at Garrett.

Then Stella turned and walked over to Sebastian. Their eyes met, and Stella lifted her hand, twirling the car keys in front of him, her eyes shining with pride and excitement.

Just then, Garrett’s phone started ringing from behind. He knew it was a call from Jaffina.

Deliberately, Garrett glanced at Sebastian before putting the call on speaker.

“Did you get it?” came an elegant woman’s voice over the phone, the melodic sound of a cello drifting in the background. “If you have, then hurry back to Jaffina. Don’t you dare ruin my son’s birthday.”

Stella froze. The moment Sebastian heard that woman’s voice, his hauntingly handsome face went as pale as a sheet, and those eyes that could chill you to the bone.

For just an instant, they showed a fleeting vulnerability, as if they might shatter at any moment.

It hit Stella only then that just how mesmerizing Sebastian's eyes truly were.

"Ma'am, we've got a situation," Garrett said. He shot a look at Stella's retreating figure, gritting his teeth through the pain.

The woman on the other end went completely silent.

"Ask her how much money she wants," the woman sneered, the cello music fading in the background, like she was strolling down a hallway.

Garrett was stunned for a moment.

'Money isn't even the issue here, but how am I supposed to explain that to her?' Garrett thought, feeling stuck.

"Enough. Give the phone to her. I'll handle this myself," said the woman.

Garrett walked toward Stella in silence.

"

"Hello, I'm from the Everhart- the woman started.

Stella didn't even let her finish, cutting in with a bored tone. "I really don't care who you are."

The woman on the other end went silent, as she'd never been talked to like that before.

Stella strolled up to Sebastian, coming to a casual stop ri

head.

in front of him. "Hand," she said, giving him a little nod with her

Sebastian's eyes were pure deepness. He could hear it. When Stella spoke to him, her voice lost that icy, careless edge she used with everyone else.

Sebastian knew he was the exception. Stella treated him differently.

Sebastian held out his big hand, palm facing up, with long, elegant fingers and knuckles that stood out clearly.

‘Honestly, those hands are way too pretty,’ Stella thought to herself.

The keys to the Pagani Zonda Sebastian, that had been waiting for all this time, finally landed in his palm, quiet and perfect.

“This is just for you,” Stella said, flashing him a soft smile.

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Chapter 87

Allan stood off to the side, watching it all unfold, and couldn’t help but sigh to himself.

Even Allan felt his eyes get a little misty when Stella walked over, let alone Sebastian.

655 vouchers

‘No wonder Sebastian wants to play dad to Stella, Allan thought. “This girl just makes you want to protect her.

Stella spoke, “This car is for Mr. Gray. I don’t care if you’re from the Everhart family in Jaffina. Even if God himself showed up-”

Once Sebastian took the keys, Stella shot a look back at Garrett, a smirk tugging at her lips. Her eyes glinted with a wild, dangerous edge, chilling and reckless.

“Anyone who wants to take it, go ahead and try,” Stella pressed.

The smirk vanished the instant Stella met Garrett’s eyes; her gaze went cold, like it was soaked in blood. It was enough to make anyone’s skin crawl.

At some point, the other side hung up, and just like that, the whole drama was over.

Lucas, whose eyes had been covered by Sebastian the whole time, finally could see again.

Lucas blinked, wide-eyed and adorable, glancing all around. But the moment he spotted Stella, his whole face lit up with pure joy. ‘It’s Stella!’ he thought.

Blake, still riding the high from all the drama, called out, "Alright, Stella, we're heading out. I'll hit you up tomorrow."

He was so pumped that he'd totally forgotten about his busted arm. Waving at Stella excitedly, he led his rowdy crew of Haliville as they marched out in a noisy pack.

Stella just lazily lifted a finger in response.

When she turned around, she found Lucas, all pale and squishy, gazing up at her with eyes sparkling like stars.

The moment Stella turned, Lucas immediately tried to reach out for a hug, but before his chubby little arms could get far, Sebastian's cold, big hand pressed them right back down.

Lucas wondered, 'Huh? What's wrong?'

Lucas puffed up and protested at Sebastian, "Hey!"

But Sebastian, face still cold as ice, didn't even bother looking at Lucas. He just reached out to Stella and said, "Come here."

Clearly, Sebastian had something on his mind.

Stella played it cool as she walked over, glancing around at the guys who'd stepped out of the shadows earlier.

They were all still standing by Sebastian, each one towering over six feet and built like they'd survived some serious chaos. One could tell these were men who'd seen real blood and thunder.

Among them was Ivan, the same guy Stella had run into before in the Gray family's dungeon.

Stella didn't bother hiding the way she sized them up, and they were checking her out just as openly.

For some reason, Stella couldn't shake the feeling that Ivan's gaze held something subtle, something different when he looked at her.

Stella came to a stop next to Sebastian, leaving a bit of space between them. Her gaze flicked over him, casual and

unintentional.

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Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel

Chapter 88

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Chapter 88

55 vouchers

“You’ve been tailing me for quite a while now,” Sebastian drawled, his voice slow and clear, making sure every word landed.

He was composed, detached, and ruthlessly decisive. Everyone on the other side tensed up, but Stella, whose wrist was still in his grasp, seemed completely oblivious to what was happening.

She looked exhausted, her gaze distant.

“But from this moment on, there’s a new rule,” Sebastian said, his voice cold and authoritative.

His eyes were icy, completely devoid of warmth, and the presence he gave off radiated absolute authority.

“Yes, Mr. Gray!” everyone responded in unison.

No one dared to object. That kind of absolute obedience was ingrained in them. When Sebastian spoke, it was law.

“Her name is Stella Carter,” Sebastian said.

When Stella heard her name, she blinked herself back to reality, a bit confused, and instinctively glanced at Sebastian. She tried to pull her wrist away, but his cold, strong grip only tightened.

“Remember this name.” Sebastian’s voice was deep and steady, each word hitting everyone like a hammer. “Remember this face. From now on, seeing her is the same as seeing me.”

On the way back, the Maybach was dead silent. The Maybach was dead silent. was dead silent. The Maybach was dead silent.

John, who was driving, kept glancing at the back through the rearview mirror, his expression hard to read.

Stella and Sebastian sat on opposite sides of the back seat, with Lucas, the adorable little guy, sandwiched between them. Lucas was happily munching on a cheese stick, swinging his tiny feet back and forth.

“Don’t get the wrong idea.” Sebastian’s cold voice cut through the silence.

Stella, who’d been gazing out the window, glanced back at Sebastian with a careless look. She raised an eyebrow. “What?” she asked.

“That was my way of paying back for that car,” Sebastian said. He didn’t even look at her, his face lost in the shifting light and shadow, making him seem unreadable, almost enigmatic.

John, sitting in the driver’s seat, was at a loss for words. ‘Mr. Gray, that’s one hell of a thank-you gift!’ he thought, his mind spinning.

Stella paused for a couple of seconds before she just replied, “Oh.”

“Oh?” Sebastian looked at her, his brow furrowing, and for a moment, the line of his throat was visible, cool, distant, and oddly captivating.

Stella wondered, ‘What else was I supposed to say? What does he want from me?’

“Thank you?” Stella said, propping her chin on one hand, her voice careless, with a hint of playfulness, trailing up at the end. But it was obvious Sebastian wasn’t satisfied.

Sebastian’s whole vibe suddenly turned dark and brooding.

Stella turned to look at Sebastian, confused. “Why are you mad?” Stella sighed.

Chapter 88

'Wasn't he the one who called it a payback for that car? So why is it wrong for me to say thanks?' she thought.

Sebastian gave a cold, humorless laugh. "I'm not mad."

55 vouchers

John glanced up at the rearview mirror again, only to meet Sebastian's stormy gaze.

John froze for a moment. He immediately reached up and lowered the soundproof partition, making himself scarce.

Lucas was completely oblivious to the tension simmering on either side of him, just munching away and kicking his feet, living his best life.

Sebastian glanced over. His expression turned even stormier. He kept waiting, hoping Stella would say something else.

Ten seconds passed, twenty seconds passed, and thirty seconds passed. Until the only thing he could hear was her steady, even breathing beside him.

Sebastian whipped his head around, staring at Stella. She was still propping her chin up with one hand, but her eyes were closed, totally knocked out. For the first time ever, pure disbelief burned in his eyes.

'Did she just fall asleep?' Sebastian thought, floored. 'No way. She actually fell asleep?'

Lucas stared at the last cheese stick in his hand, clearly reluctant to let it go. Suddenly, he hunched his shoulders a bit. 'Wait, did it just get colder in here?' Lucas wondered. 'Why is the car suddenly so chilly?'

With his usual cuteness, Lucas tilted his little head until his eyes met Uncle Sebastian's. He blinked his big eyes. 'Is Uncle Sebastian angry?' Lucas wondered.

Inside the dim car, Sebastian and Lucas locked eyes in silence. Lucas, moving extra slow, clutched the last cheese stick to his chest, shooting Sebastian a cautious, almost defensive look.

Sebastian just stared back at him, his expression unreadable.

Lucas wondered, 'Uh-oh, I'm scared!'

Sebastian kept his poker face, still staring at Lucas without a word.

Lucas's lips quivered as he nervously stretched out his wobbly little hand, holding the last cheese stick out to Sebastian.

Lucas wanted to sob. 'No way Uncle Sebastian would actually eat it!' Lucas thought, absolutely convinced.

Hopeful and sure, Lucas looked up at Sebastian, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

After a moment, the silence hung in the air.

As he could see right through Lucas, Sebastian gave a chilly smirk and just leaned in, taking a big bite out of the cheese stick.

Lucas stared at his hand, now holding nothing but the empty white stick. He was totally stunned, like he'd turned to stone. His eyes went huge, pupils shaking like crazy. Tears welled up in his eyes in an instant.

Sebastian raised his hand and silently pointed at Stella, who was still fast asleep, signaling Lucas to hold back his tears and not wake her up.

"Heh," Sebastian turned away in silence, leaving Lucas totally petrified, staring at the empty white stick in his hand, as he'd just been zapped.

In that moment, the heart of a five-year-old boy was crushed into tiny pieces, scattered all over the floor!

'Uncle Sebastian, that's so unfair,' Lucas thought, feeling totally wronged.
'Meanie!'

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55 vouchers

At the dock, a black Mercedes was parked in the darkness.

Carlos was sitting inside with the window down, worry etched across his face.

“Wasn’t he supposed to be out tonight? Why isn’t he back yet?” Carlos asked anxiously, his voice tight with worry.

‘How the hell did Sebastian manage to snag that land in South District?’ Carlos racked his brain, totally baffled.

No matter how hard he tried to dig up answers, even sending people to poke around inside, everyone just zipped their lips. Not a single soul dared to spill anything.

‘Damn it, this is insane!’ Carlos cursed inwardly.

He’d barely gotten his hands on the land, and now Gray Group’s project was falling apart. This is definitely Sebastian’s payback for kicking me out of Gray Group,’ Carlos thought.

Carlos forced himself to calm down, pulling his thoughts together.

‘Guess I really let my emotions get the best of me this time,’ he reflected, a wave of regret washing over him.

“Carlos,” the driver reminded him.

Headlights pierced the darkness, drawing closer. Without a moment’s hesitation, Carlos got out of the car and stood directly in front of the Maybach, which prowled through the night like a dangerous eagle.

A long black skid mark streaked across the pavement. The car stopped dead in front of Carlos.

“Mr. Gray?” Carlos called out, his voice cutting through the night.

The soundproof partition slid up, and John glanced over, giving Sebastian a quick heads-up.

Stella’s eyes flew open, icy and sharp. She instinctively loosened her grip on Lucas.

She’d expected her head to slam into the window from the abrupt stop, but nothing happened.

She turned her head and, just for a moment, glimpsed a sickly pale face in her line of sight.

Sebastian pulled his hand back, his face blank and unreadable.

The window slid down.

Sebastian fixed Carlos with a dark, intense stare, making Carlos's heart skip a beat.

"Sebastian, that ancient tomb mess with the Gray Group project, was that you?" Carlos asked, but he was already sure of the

answer.

Sebastian didn't even acknowledge him. His handsome face, half-shrouded in the night, gave off such a dangerous aura that Carlos couldn't help but feel a chill.

"I'll let you come back to Gray Group, but only if you hand over that land in the South District," Carlos began, but before he could finish, Sebastian cut him off with a cold, mocking laugh

"Excuse me, don't mind me. Carry on," Stella drawled.

She casually lifted a hand to shield her eyes, the smirk on her lips sharp and biting.

'He's got the nerve to say that. I'm honestly too embarrassed to even listen,' Stella thought, rolling her eyes. 'Absolutely

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shameless.

The window slowly rolled up, a clear sign that Sebastian was done listening to this crap.

55 vouchers

"Do you really think Gray Group can't function without you? I could just call up the Everhart family and have them step in to save the day.

"So tell me, if they get involved, do you really think all of Gray Group's problems won't just magically disappear?" Carlos shot back, his voice dripping with threat.

Carlos's face darkened.

'I'm already giving him an out. If he insists on being stubborn, he can't blame me for getting ruthless,' Carlos thought, his jaw set with cold determination.

The window, rolling up, came to an abrupt halt.

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Chapter 89

It's the Everhart family again!' Stella thought.

When the name came up again, Stella glanced at Sebastian while cradling Lucas in her arms.

His face was completely swallowed by the darkness, his expression so faint that it was almost invisible.

55 vouchers

Just as Carlos thought he had Sebastian right where he wanted him, Sebastian's voice, cold and mocking, drifted out from the half-lowered car window.

"The Everhart family is your lifeline, Grandpa. You'd never use it unless you were truly desperate," Sebastian said.

Before Carlos could even catch his breath, Sebastian's voice, sharp as ice, sliced through the silence again. Words that hit like a dagger to the throat.

Carlos was left speechless.

He couldn't even come up with a comeback.

"John, drive," Sebastian said.

The window slid up, sealing the car off from the world, and Carlos could only watch helplessly as the black Maybach rolled past him.

In Sandridge Island, after getting out of the car, Sebastian headed upstairs without a word.

Stella watched him go in silence, while Lucas, still in his little shark pajamas, clutched a white stick, his head lolling to the side like a listless little ghost. He looked completely spaced out.

About ten minutes later, Allan came back. "Sebastian's in his room?"

He looked around furtively, like he was pulling off a heist, only relaxing and speaking in his normal voice once he was sure Sebastian wasn't anywhere nearby.

Hearing the name Sebastian, Lucas puffed up like a grumpy little pufferfish.

'Uncle Sebastian is a bad guy!' Lucas thought, his cheeks puffed out in indignation.

Allan didn't bother with the little gremlin. He stood next to Stella and said, "Just remember, never mention the Everhart family in front of Sebastian. Don't even ask why."

Allan glanced down at Stella with a resigned sigh. "Never mind, I know you won't ask."

"Got it," Stella replied. She lowered her gaze, her expression unreadable.

*

At midnight, Stella stepped out of the bathroom after her shower, drying her hair with a white towel in one hand while flipping open her custom-built ultra-thin laptop with the other. The glow from the screen lit up her skin.

Her fingers paused for a second before she typed in “Jaffina” and “Everhart family. Results popped up right away.

Jaffina, right under the king’s nose, was crawling with powerful families. The Everhart family couldn’t even get a foot in the door of the top tier; no wonder Stella had zero impression of that name,

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Chapter 89

But for the top families in Haliville, the Everhart family was a name they could only dream of reaching.

Stella casually closed the browser with a flick of her wrist.

55 vouchers

After a quick pause, her fingers danced over the keyboard, and a little red scorpion icon popped up on the screen.

Shark’s account logged back in. [Shark?]

On the black screen, lines of white text from Shark spammed the chat, flooding the screen so fast Stella could barely keep

Stella was getting annoyed by the barrage, so she raised her hand and muted the chat with a click.

Shark: [Quiet now?]

Stella rolled her eyes and unmuted the chat again.

Blade: [Why haven’t you contacted us?]

Yarrow: [Why are you in Clusia?]

Shark: [Are we working with the Everhart family in Jaffina?]

Stella ignored their questions and tossed out her own.

Nimbus: [No, but they won't leave us alone.]

Stella paused, her face unreadable.

Shark: [Put the Everhart family from Jaffina on the blacklist. From now on, we never work with them. I mean it, absolutely no exceptions.]

Right as she hit send, someone knocked on her door.

Stella snapped her laptop shut, totally unfazed by the cries coming from the other side. Her account auto-locked and logged

out.

She got up lazily and opened the door. There was nobody at the door.

But he didn't dare say that out; he just let out a dry chuckle.

Stella glanced down and found Lucas standing there in his adorable cartoon shark pajamas, hugging a pillow, his eyes sparkling up at her.

Stella just stared, speechless. She was starting to suspect Lucas had an entire wardrobe full of those cute shark pajamas.

"Come in," Stella said, stepping aside to let the freshly bathed, soft and sweet-smelling little guy into the room. Meanwhile, Snowball, unable to find his favorite ball anywhere in the corners, quietly slipped out of sight.

Lucas buried himself in Stella's big bed. He was so happy that he started wiggling and kicking his feet in pure joy.

Everything smelled just like Stella. 'I'm so happy!' Lucas thought.

Meanwhile, over in Sebastian's bedroom, the mood was dark, like storm clouds gathering.

The moment Snowball nudged the door open, it instantly regretted it. Not that its snake brain could really figure out why Sebastian had left the door ajar like that.

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Is this some kind of snake trap?’ Snowball wondered, its big head full of questions.

But that thought only stuck around for a nanosecond before it started slowly dragging its huge body inside.

My ball, Snowball thought, obsessing over his favorite toy. ‘My ball. My precious ball? Where did it go?’

26

55 vouchers

With a click, the warm yellow wall lamp flicked on. Snowball practically jumped out of its scales, frozen on the spot.

Sebastian, dressed in black pajamas, sat with a blank face on the black leather armchair, his long, icy fingers idly twirling a pink ball.

Snowball was stunned for a moment.

Sebastian dangled the toy ball in one hand, shooting Snowball a cold, unimpressed look. “Looking for this?” he asked.

Snowball gulped, its nerves shot.

Snowball just wanted to turn tail and pretend none of this ever happened.

‘If I don’t move, maybe he won’t see me. If I don’t move, maybe he won’t see me,’ Snowball chanted in its head, desperately hoping Sebastian would forget it was even there.

Sebastian shot it a frosty look and beckoned him over. Snowball flicked its tongue, slithered over lazily, and stared at its beloved toy ball with its tiny red bean eyes, never taking its eyes off its precious treasure.

It was the cruelest distance in the world. Snowball was here, and his ball was way over there.

Sebastian didn’t say a word, just idly ran his hand over Snowball’s smooth scales. Snowball sprawled out on the floor, looking totally chill.

'If it's fate, I can't escape it. Guess I'll just go with the flow,' Snowball thought, resigned.

"Is Lucas in his own room?" Sebastian asked, his voice icy.

Snowball was clearly pampered; its scales were spotless, not a whiff of that usual snake funk. They gleamed pearly white with a touch of pink, and he actually smelled fresh and clean.

Snowball lifted its big head and gave a slow, mechanical shake from side to side.

"Is Lucas in Stella's room?" Sebastian asked, his voice still icy.

Snowball nodded, slow and obedient.

Sebastian fell silent again.

Snowball's tail thumped against the floor, one lazy beat after another.

'Life's rough for a snake like me, Snowball heaved a sigh. 'I really miss flopping around on my belly in Stella's room. That's gone for good.

"What do you see?" Sebastian asked. He lifted his hand in a languid gesture, the dark circles under his eyes making him look detached and sickly.

Snowball flicked its tongue.

'It's a water cup,' Snowball thought. 'Looks like it's full of water?' he wondered, staring at the cup.

Snowball cocked its big head at Sebastian, who was staring right back, lazily spinning his favorite ball between his fingers. There was this weird, dangerous tension hanging in the air.

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Chapter 89

Snowball felt its scales bristle all over again, ready to freak out on the spot.

Their eyes met, and Sebastian gave it a sly, chilling grin.

55 vouchers

With a sudden flick, Snowball's precious ball shot toward the headboard, and in the next instant, the cup of water toppled, soaking the black sheets.

Snowball stiffly twisted its big head, glaring at its damn owner like, 'Are you for real right now? Is this even something a human would do? Do humans even talk like that?' Snowball grumbled to itself, still in shock.

Snowball was so stunned that it could barely process what just happened. If his pet translator had been on, it would've been spitting out the nastiest curses in the book.

And not just any curses, he'd be dropping the dirtiest, most savage ones out there.

"It's way too late to bother getting someone to change the sheets. Looks like I'll have to go bunk with Lucas tonight," Sebastian said coolly

as if it was no big deal.

'Seriously?' Snowball raged inside, totally exasperated.

The bedroom door slid open without a sound.

Sebastian, in his electric wheelchair, had just opened the door and found himself face to face with Stella, who was still up. Their eyes locked.

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Chapter 90

Sebastian glanced over.

Stella turned to look at Sebastian, confused.

Snowball, trailing behind Sebastian with its beloved ball in its mouth, thought, 'Uh-oh!'

Snowball glanced left at Stella, then right at Sebastian with its big white head.

'Surprised? Didn't expect that, did you?' Snowball mused.

Feeling great, Snowball slid past Sebastian's feet and hung itself up on the tree like it owned the place.

"You need something?" Stella asked, seeing Sebastian was just standing there.

Sebastian cleared his throat. "Is Lucas with you?"

Stella glanced at Lucas, who was sleeping soundly on the bed with his little butt in the air, and gave a quiet nod.

Sebastian kept his cool. "I'll take him back to his room to sleep."

26

55 vouchets

Stella was silent for a couple of seconds, watching as Sebastian walked in, expressionless, and rolled Lucas and the blanket together in one smooth motion.

As he passed her, he gave a polite nod. "Sorry to bother you."

Then Sebastian walked out without looking back.

The door closed behind Sebastian.

Stella turned to look at Sebastian, confused.

Snowball yawned lazily.

'Guess he just shot myself in the foot by picking me up,' Snowball mused. 'Ouch!'

Early the next morning, Lucas was jolted awake by a chilly draft. He rubbed his eyes with his tiny, super-cute hands; his cuteness was absolutely lethal. Still half-asleep, he slowly turned his head.

Lucas saw Sebastian looking like he hadn't slept a wink, his face dark as thunderclouds as he stared at the ceiling, lying there like a villain plotting the end of the world.

Sebastian noticed Lucas was awake and turned to look at him.

Lucas and Sebastian locked eyes in total silence.

Sebastian, face blank, got up and rolled his wheelchair out of the nursery.

Lucas stared at Sebastian's retreating back, completely confused. 'What just happened?' he was still totally lost.

In the dining room, Allan swaggered in, looking fresh and energetic. But the moment he caught Jake shooting him, exaggerated, warning winks, his smile froze on his face.

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Chapter 90

Allan thought, 'Seriously?'

55 vouchers

Sebastian sat at the head of the table, his face pale and sickly, completely expressionless, like he was wrapped in a cloud of dark, menacing energy.

The dark circles under his eyes were even more pronounced than before.

Allan pulled out a chair, about to sit down.

The sound of the chair scraping across the floor echoed through the dining room.

Sebastian looked up, his gaze dark and menacing as he stared at Allan.

Allan gulped. ‘Someone save me! Please, anyone!’ he panicked inwardly.

Next to him, Jake just silently covered his eyes with his hand.

Suddenly, Lucas’s sweet little voice piped up from the hallway, with Stella’s calm response right behind. Instantly, the heavy atmosphere in the dining room melted away.

Sebastian snapped out of it, pretending nothing had happened.

Allan, still in a daze, dropped into his seat. ‘Shit! Double standards, my ass. Drop dead!’ Allan fumed inwardly.

“Morning,” Stella said, glancing at Sebastian. Big Ben picked Lucas up and set him in his seat, then stood nearby.

Snowball, hanging from the tree, watched Big Ben, drooling with emotion.

“Morning, Stella!” Allan called out with a grin, but his smile froze the next second. He turned his head and met a pair of completely emotionless eyes.

Allan wondered, ‘Shit!’

“Morning,” Sebastian replied coldly, then looked up at Stella.

But Stella didn’t notice. “No, being picky,” she said, her attention on Lucas, who was carefully pushing the broccoli to the

side.

Lucas tilted his head and pointed over at Sebastian.

On the edge of his plate, the carrots he’d picked out were lined up like little soldiers.

It looked like they were in boot camp.

Sebastian glanced over.

Stella turned to look at Sebastian, confused.

Allan stifled a laugh, quickly hiding behind his coffee cup and pretending nothing was out of the ordinary.

Stella gave Sebastian a casual glance.

The next moment, Sebastian picked up his fork and slowly placed each carrot, lined up like little soldiers, into his mouth, one by one.

He moved slowly. His face was completely expressionless. Reluctantly, Lucas shoved the broccoli into his mouth and chewed and chewed.

He swallowed. His cute little face scrunched up in misery. 'Ugh, this is the worst!' Lucas thought.

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26

55 vouchers

"Hey, Ms. Carter, there's a package for you. Mind stepping outside for a moment?" John walked in from outside, calling out.

Stella stood up and headed out.

The dining room fell silent again.

Almost at the same time, Sebastian, stone-faced, discreetly deposited the unchewed carrot into a napkin.

He neatly folded up the napkin. Then he tossed it away as if nothing had happened.

Lucas and Allan thought, 'Seriously?'

Jake, Snowball, and Big Ben were stunned for a moment.

Lucas stared at Sebastian, wide-eyed and clueless, utterly floored by what he'd just seen. His mouth hung open in shock.

Lucas jabbed at his watch with a trembling little hand.

Big Ben stammered, "Y-You-."

"Just wait till Stella comes back, I'm snitching!" Big Ben huffed.

Hearing that, Sebastian just stared at Lucas in silence, like he was weighing his options. Then, he rolled over to his nephew and reached out, and took off Lucas's kid's digital watch!

If one couldn't solve the problem, one just got rid of the one who was causing it. He thought, 'Damn, it's amazing.'

Lucas and Allan thought, 'Seriously?'

Jake, Snowball, and Big Ben were stunned for a moment.

What a cunning guy!' Big Ben thought. 'Damn, what the fuck.'

Outside the villa, Stella stood there deadpan, staring at the massive shipping container in front of her.

If she remembered right, she'd told those old geezers to just send "a few things." She even made a list, just in case something like this happened.

'So, seriously, what is all this stuff?' Stella was totally speechless.

stella was totally speechless.

"Ms. Carter, can you sign for this?" said the delivery guy, his uniform sporting the "Nova" logo.

He wore a smile warm as the morning sun, a fitting face for a service that delivered anything, anywhere, at impossible speed.

Of course, the price was so sky-high even millionaires would flinch!/
/

And on top of that, it was a whole freaking shipping container!

Stella just signed and watched them unload, without saying a word the whole time.

John quietly sidled away. 'Ms. Carter is giving off some seriously murderous vibes,' he wondered.

After a moment, Stella returned to the dining room.

Lucas perked up, ready to snatch the moment he saw her walk in. Allan kept his head down, slurping his soup. Jake

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pretended to be fascinated by the ceiling.

55 vouchers

As for Sebastian, he was still sitting calmly at the head of the table, face blank, not a flicker of emotion.

“Hmm?” Stella turned her head, eyeing the little troublemaker.

With a loud crack,” the egg in her hand “accidentally” exploded, yolk and all, right in her grip.

For a split second, the whole room went dead silent.

Allan instinctively snapped his legs together, his lazy slouch vanishing as he sat up straight as a board. Lucas did so silently.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to scare you,” Stella said, taking a couple of seconds to cool off. She grabbed a napkin and wiped her hands, calm as ever. “We’ll go check out the package in a minute!”

Lucas nodded obediently, looking as cute and well-behaved as ever.

Allan’s phone started ringing. He picked up, looking totally lost, but the moment he heard who it was, his face changed.

“What? The Gray family is secretly working with Dr. Kramer’s team?” Allan blurted out.

Stella froze mid-motion. ‘Conrad?’ Stella thought, her mind racing.

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