

Through Rising Fog We Walk Paths Unknown Yet Comforting

Chapter 221

BELLA'S POV

My face was reflected clearly in Kane's dark pupils. His eyes were deep and intense. I tried once more to take the photo back from him, but it was useless. In the end, I had no choice but to give up.

He kept the photo.

I still didn't understand why he wanted that particular picture of me as a child.

Was it really that special? People like him had surely seen countless beautiful and cute people.

Was a single old photo of a thin little girl in a floral dress really enough to make him keep it for himself?

I couldn't figure him out. But right now, meeting Tara mattered more.

When I was about to leave, Kane calmly told the driver to take me there. I knew better than to refuse. Once he

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decided something, there was no room for argument.

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Inside the car, I told the driver the address. I was

Lucky Draw

surprised when we arrived much earlier than expected. What should have taken an hour only took half that time. I didn't comment on it. With Kane, things like this no longer shocked me.

I got out of the car and walked into a fast-food restaurant nearby. The place was bright and clean, filled with the smell of fried food

and coffee. I chose a corner seat near the glass window, ordered a six-dollar drink, and sent Tara a message to let her know I had arrived.

While waiting, I looked out through the clear French window. Several food delivery riders rushed in and out of the restaurant. They wore helmets and carried large insulated bags on their backs. Their movements were fast. Orders came in, orders went out.

Food delivery.

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The thought stirred something in my chest.

My driver's license had been canceled, but that didn't mean I couldn't ride a motorcycle. Food delivery jobs paid by volume. There was no fixed salary, no favors 2/8

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owed. The more you worked, the more you earned.

Lucky Draw

If my criminal record didn't block me, this could be a way

out.

At least I would not be burdening others.

At the hospital, whenever I took leave, Jasmine had to shoulder more work. It felt wrong. The salary there was fixed anyway, and now I had to pay part of my grandmother's medical expenses. Every extra bill tightened the rope around my neck.

I was so deep in thought that I didn't notice Tara until her voice pulled me back.

"What are you thinking so seriously about?" she asked, sitting down across from me.

I blinked and looked at her familiar face. "I was thinking... maybe I should become a food delivery rider."

Tara stared at me as if I had just said something unbelievable. "Food delivery? Bella, that job is brutal. Long hours, bad weather, customer complaints. And most riders are men. It's exhausting."

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“I know,” I said calmly. “But at least I won’t be dragging anyone else down. If I do well or badly, it’s on me. Not like the hospital. When I take leave, someone else has to cover for me.”

Tara thought about it for a moment and nodded slowly. “That part is true.”

Then she frowned slightly. “But why are you here so early today? Didn’t you say you get off later?”

“I hurt my hand,” I said. “I took a few days off. I was thinking maybe it’s time to change my job.”

Her eyes dropped to my hands. Only then did she notice the thick gauze around my fingers. Her face changed instantly. “What happened to your hands? Bella, what did you do?”

I didn’t hide it from her. I couldn’t even if I tried. I briefly told her everything that happened the night before. I kept it short, but even so, Tara’s expression grew darker with every word.

By the time I finished, she was clenching her teeth. 4/8

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“How can there be a father like that?” she said angrily. “Even if he favors Kathy, he can’t treat you like that. He knew what that album meant to you and still burned it!”

I let out a small laugh “Yeah. That man is my father.”

Strangely, I didn’t feel much pain as I said it. Only numbness. I had known for a long time that his heart no longer held my mother. If he had cared even a little, he would have visited me in prison. Blood ties meant nothing to him.

“Does it hurt?” Tara asked softly, pointing at my hands.

“It’s fine,” I said. “It looks worse than it is. I didn’t feel much pain today. I could still carry things.”

She finally relaxed a little and ordered some food for herself.

As we ate, our conversation slowly shifted to the reason she had urgently called me before.

“You mentioned a witness on the phone,” I said. “What’s going on?”

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Tara leaned closer and lowered her voice. “One of my colleagues posted a video in our work group. It was a wedding video. The groom... Bella, I think it’s one of the witnesses from your case.”

My hand paused.

She took out her phone and played the video for me. The screen showed a lively wedding scene. People were laughing, shouting, teasing the groom. He looked happy, full of life. He kept smiling.

But my eyes locked onto his face.

My mind spun. I remembered him.

I remembered the cold, flat way he had spoken in court. I remembered his calm expression as he testified that he saw me drug Sophia’s drink, that he even tried to stop me, that I ignored him and walked away.

None of it was true.

I had never met him before that day. We only happened to be dining at nearby tables at the banquet. I didn’t

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understand then, and I still didn't understand now why he had testified against me.

"Is it him?" Tara asked.

"Yes," I said after a moment. "It should be him."

"Do you know where he is now?" she asked.

"He lives in GL City," I said slowly. "Can you find out more?"

"It shouldn't be hard," Tara replied. "I'll ask my colleague.

She said his last name is Ren."

Ren. That was a unique name. Not many people had that surname.

"I'll investigate first," I said. "I won't rush in blindly."

Tara nodded. "I get it. That case was too strange. Too many witnesses suddenly pointed at you. It felt planned."

I said nothing, but her words echoed my thoughts.

Even though Kathy made me take the fall for her, a lot of 2

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people still testified falsely against me. I didn't know why.

Someone had woven an invisible net back then.

Who? Why?

And what role had the werewolf families played in it?

That was also why I had never asked Kane for help. I didn't know where the Stonewood family truly stood. I couldn't afford another mistake.

“All right,” Tara said, squeezing my hand gently, careful not to touch the gauze. “We’ll take it step by step.”

I nodded “Thank you”

The truth had waited this long. It could wait a little longer.

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BELLA’S POV:

Tara and I sat across from each other in the small restaurant. We had ordered more cups of coffee and some pastries.

Tara talked a lot. She always did when she relaxed. She told me about funny cases at work, annoying colleagues, and small office gossip. I listened, nodded, and smiled at the right moments, but my mind drifted in and out. I enjoyed hearing her voice. It reminded me that I was still part of the world.

At one point, she leaned forward. “You know what happened yesterday? My supervisor almost—”

I suddenly felt something strange, like a tight pull in my chest. It was instinct. I looked up without thinking.

Across the street, not far from the café, a car was parked by the curb. The window was half open. A man sat inside.

He looked young, somewhere between a teenager and a 1/8 young man. His face was handsome. His skin was pale.

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His features were fine, too fine, like something painted carefully on canvas. But his lips were pressed into a thin line, and his black eyes were fixed in my direction.

They were cold and angry.

I didn’t recognize him. Who was he? And why was he looking this way?

My fingers tightened slightly around my cup. My heartbeat slowed instead of speeding up. Prison had taught me this reaction. When danger might be near, panic only made things worse.

“Is he... angry?” I wondered.

His eyes didn’t look elsewhere. They stayed steady and focused on me. For a brief second, I had the strange feeling that he was not just looking at the café but at me.

“Bella.”

Tara’s voice broke through my thoughts.

“Bella, I’m talking to you. Did you hear me?” 2/8

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I blinked and pulled my eyes away from the street. “Sorry. What were you saying?”

“I asked if the doctor said when your hand would heal,” Tara repeated. Her tone was full of concern.

I lifted my bandaged hand slightly. “About a week. After that, it’s just waiting for the skin to heal.”

I glanced back toward the street. To my surprise, the car was gone. So was the man.

It was as if they had never been there. I blinked at the empty space in shock.

“What are you looking at?” Tara asked, turning her head to follow my gaze. “Is there something outside?”

I shook my head and gave a small smile. “Nothing. I was probably distracted.”

I told myself the same thing. Even if the man had looked

angry,

it

didn’t mean he was angry at me. People carried all kinds of emotions. I had learned that not everything was about me. He could have just been having a bad day and was spacing out.

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“By the way,” Tara said suddenly, lowering her voice a little, “have you forgiven Kane? What’s going on with you two?”

My hand paused near my lips.

“We’re... sort of living together,” I said.

Tara nearly jumped out of her seat. “Living together? Like cohabiting?”

The word sounded much worse out loud.

“No,” I said quickly. “Not like that. I’m just staying there for now. His place is big. I have my own room.”

She stared at me, disbelief written clearly on her face. “Bella, you’re still living with a man who lied to you? Kane caused so much pain back then. Prison, everything that followed... How can you stay with him?”

Her words hit close. I hated lies more than anything. Prison had taught me how dangerous lies could be. Kane was part of my past trauma, whether I liked it or not.

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Lucky Draw

I forced a calm smile. “I’m not being forced. My hand is injured. It’s convenient for now. He hasn’t crossed any lines.”

“But-”

“I know what you’re thinking,” I interrupted gently, “I’m careful. I haven’t forgotten anything.”

That was true. I had not forgiven him completely. But I also couldn’t deny the way he treated me now. Kane was quiet, distant, but attentive in his own way. He never spoke too much, never explained himself unless necessary. His words were few, but when he spoke, they carried weight.

There was danger in him. He was powerful too.

And yet, he had given me space.

“Let’s change the topic,” I said softly. “Didn’t you say your mom is setting you up on blind dates again?”

Tara groaned immediately. "Don't remind me. She's acting like I'm about to expire. I'm only twenty-seven!" 5/8

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Lucky Draw

I laughed quietly. "Have you met anyone interesting?"

She hesitated, then touched her nose awkwardly. "Maybe... a long time ago."

Something was definitely off.

"Really?" I asked. "That's new."

She sighed. "I had a crush once. He was young, very young. I felt like an old cow eating young grass."

I nearly choked on my coffee. "You're only twenty-seven."

"He was younger," she insisted. "I met him abroad. It was short. Nice. That's all."

Abroad. The word tightened my chest.

I remembered that trip clearly. Tara had gone for an interview at a foreign school. She had been so hopeful, so excited. And then my incident happened. Everything collapsed after that.

She never went back. Thinking about it made me feel guilty. I had changed her path.

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Lucky Draw

No wonder her parents were still upset with me and with her too. Even I could not forgive myself.

Tara noticed my expression immediately. "Hey. Don't go there," she said firmly. "It wasn't your fault. Even if I went, my grades weren't good enough. I wouldn't have gotten in."

I looked at her seriously. "Tara, thank you. If you ever need me, I'll do anything for you."

She frowned and slapped my shoulder lightly. "Stop being dramatic. It's gross. Just reverse your case and live well. That'll be thanks enough."

“I will,” I said, though I still felt doubt in my heart. Three years had passed. If someone had been pulling strings back then, would the truth still come out?

We sat there a little longer, finishing our coffee. We talked about small things. About the future. About nothing important and everything important at once.

“I’m glad you’re still here,” Tara said softly. “I’ve got your back. Always.”

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I nodded. “And I’ve got yours.”

For the first time in a long while, I believed it.

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BELLA’S POV

When I returned to the Stonewood Residence that night, the house was quiet. The lights in the living room were dim. Kane sat on the sofa alone. His posture was straight. His attention was fixed on something in his hand.

As I walked closer, I saw it clearly.

It was the photo.

The one he had taken from me earlier.

My steps slowed without me realizing it. My chest tightened. That picture was old, worn at the edges, and precious in a way I never explained to anyone.

Before I could speak, Kane sensed my presence. He looked up, then calmly slipped the photo back into his pocket.

“You’re back,” he said. “How was your meeting with your friend?”

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Lucky Draw

“It went quite well,” I replied. I placed my bag down and stood a short distance away from him. I was a bit unsure whether to sit or keep standing. Most times, I didn’t even know how to act around him.

He leaned back slightly. “Did she give you anything useful about your case?”

The way he asked sounded casual, but I knew better. Kane never asked pointless questions.

“It should be useful,” I said honestly. “But I still don’t understand why the witness lied. I’m worried that if I go to him directly, he’ll avoid me. So I want to gather more information first before making any move.”

As soon as I finished speaking, I noticed something shift in him. His eyes darkened slightly. They were sharper before.

I hesitated, then asked quietly, “Do you believe I wasn’t the one who poisoned your fiancée?”

The air changed instantly.

Hooked at me. I felt as if he could see straight through3

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my skin, into every fear and doubt I carried.

Lucky Draw

“Why does my opinion matter to you?” he asked calmly.

The question hit harder than I expected.

I paused. My lips curved into a small bitter smile. He was right. Why should I care? We were bound by circumstance, not trust or affection.

And yet... my heartbeat betrayed me. It sped up every time he looked at me. The attraction I felt to him was

impossible to ignore.

“I’m going back to my room,” I said softly.

I turned and took two steps toward the stairs. Then his hand closed around my arm.

It was sudden. Before I could react, he pulled me back. I stumbled forward and collided with his chest. His scent surrounded me and filled my senses. My breath caught as his arm steadied me.

He leaned down, placing his lips close to my ear.

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“I believe you’re innocent,” he whispered.

The words sent a shock through me.

My fingers curled against his chest. His voice was low. There was no doubt or pity in his voice. There was only certainty.

I looked up at him, stunned.

“But do you really think you can find the truth on your own?” he continued. “It’s been three years. Evidence fades. People disappear. What if there’s nothing left?”

I met his gaze. My heart pounded, but my voice stayed calm.

“Even someone as powerful as you thinks I can’t change the past,” I said quietly. “But someone like me still wants to try. I don’t have power. I don’t have backing. All I have is hope that one day, I can clear my name.”

We were too close. I could feel the heat of his body, the tension in his arms. My body reacted before my mind did. I hated it. And I didn’t.

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Something flashed in his eyes, like pain.

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After a moment, he spoke again. "What if I help you?"

My breath stilled.

"What if I help you find the truth?" he said. "Would you stay by my side?"

I stared at him, completely unprepared for the offer.

"What if I made you a deal?" he murmured. We were so close that I could feel his warm breath against my skin. "Stay with me. Be by my side. I'll uncover everything for you."

My heart raced violently. Saying yes could change everything. It could clear my name. But it could also trap me in something I didn't understand.

Freedom had already been taken from me once.

"I'll find the truth myself," I said after a long pause.

His expression shifted. He slowly straightened, releasing some of the pressure between us. His eyes became 20:53

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distant.

Lucky Draw

"Is that so?" he said quietly. "Come to me if you ever change your mind."

His hand loosened.

I pulled my arm free, bit my lip, and walked toward the stairs without looking back.

My legs felt weak, but I didn't stop.

KATHY'S POV

I sat in a private room of a luxurious club. I leaned close to Eric, smiling gently, pouring him a drink. I'd do anything to please him.

I had no guarantees. I knew that. That was why I tried harder.

What drove me mad was that ever since I walked into the room, all he wanted to talk about was Bella.

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Lucky Draw

“Tell me about her childhood,” Eric said calmly. “Was she always like this?”

I stiffened inside but smiled. “Bella? She was quiet. Always studying.”

“What about medical school?” he asked. “Was she talented?”

“She was... outstanding,” I replied carefully. “Teachers loved her.”

“What kind of person was she with family?” he continued. “Did she ever talk about marriage?”

Each question felt like a slap.

Why is he so interested in her? I’m the one sitting here!

I clenched my fingers under the table. I was shaking with anger but I hid it. I couldn’t afford to offend Eric.

“She took care of people,” I said softly. “Even when she was young.”

Eric listened closely. His eyes were focused. He looke@0:53

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even more focused than he ever did with me. He didn’t interrupt. That annoyed me even more.

After a while, I lowered my head and said, “Eric, I know

I made mistakes before. I lost the second female lead role. People are laughing at me now. They say your past girlfriends were all famous stars, and I'm just... nothing."

He looked at me calmly, waiting.

I swallowed and continued, "I want to prove myself. Give me another film. Any role. I'll do it well this time."

"What kind of film?" he asked.

"Anything," I said quickly. "I don't care."

"I'll think about it," he replied.

I felt so relieved. My chest loosened a little. I smiled.

"You're so good to me, Eric!"

I leaned forward, trying to fall into his arms.

He stopped me. His hand came up and covered the upper

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half of my face, leaving only my lips exposed. I gasped in shock. Why didn't he ever let me touch him?

"Eric..." Panic crept into my chest.

His voice was low. "Tell me one more thing."

"Yes?" I whispered.

"Does Bella still trust anyone?"

The question chilled me to the bone.

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KATHY'S POV

Eric's fingers rested lightly on my lips. They were cool, almost gentle, yet the touch made my skin tense. His eyes stayed fixed on my mouth but they looked distant,

as if he was looking through me instead of at me. I felt it clearly then – his thoughts were not with me.

The thought of it hurt me. It broke my heart.

His fingertips traced my lower lip slowly.

“These lips...” he said quietly. “They remind me of someone.”

My heart sank.

Before I could ask who, he spoke again. “Tell me more about your sister.”

I froze. It felt like someone poured cold water on me.

“Huh? You want me to continue like this?” I asked. I was

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confused. His hand was still covering my eyes, blocking

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Lucky Draw

my view, leaving me exposed in a way that made me uncomfortable.

“Yes,” he said without hesitation. “Just like that. Keep talking.”

I clenched my teeth inwardly.

So this was it. Even in moments like this, all he wanted was Bella.

I forced myself to speak, even as jealousy burned in my chest. “Bella... she was always calm. Too calm. People liked her easily. Teachers, elders, even strangers.”

Eric’s fingers paused for a brief second, then continued

their slow movement.

“She had a good background,” I continued reluctantly. “Good grades. A future everyone admired. But then she ruined everything herself. Three years in prison is enough to destroy anyone.”

I almost laughed bitterly. Bella was a sanitation worker now. A criminal in the public’s eyes. What did Eric see in Bér?

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Eric said nothing. He only listened.

Lucky Draw

didn't

I continued. "Sometimes I think... maybe you break up with me completely because I'm her sister."

The thought stabbed at me. I pushed it away quickly. No. That couldn't be true.

Jealousy curled deep in my stomach.

"What else?" he whispered.

"Well," I said quickly, forcing myself to continue, "my sister once dated Damien Silverwood."

That finally got a reaction.

Eric's fingers lifted slightly. "Go on."

"He pursued her for a while," I said. "Once, they went hiking. She twisted her ankle. Damien carried her down the mountain himself. After that, she agreed to date him."

Eric's hand dropped from my face. Light flooded back into my vision. I met his eyes directly for the first time. 3/9

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Lucky Draw

"They were sweet back then," I added, carefully choosing my words. I left the part out where I stole Damien from her while she was in prison.

"She used to make lunch for him every day. Packed it neatly. She looked happy." I said.

I wanted him to understand. Bella had already loved someone. She wasn't pure. She wasn't untouched.

Eric stared at me for a long moment. His eyes were calm, but there was something else there.

“Did she start dating
Damien Silverwood just because he carried her down a mountain?” he asked.

“Y—
yes,” I said quickly. “And... I heard they were fated mates. Then everything happened after that.”

He looked down at the ground slightly. His jaw tightened.

“You can leave,” he said suddenly.

I blinked in confusion “What?”

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“Why are you still here?” he asked, frowning.

Lucky Draw

Wait....did he just dismiss me?
His actions stung but I knew more than anyone that there was no use arguing
with Eric.

I stood up stiffly,. My chest felt
tight as I walked toward the door. Just before leaving, I turned back.

Eric was already lost in thought, staring at nothing. He didn’t look at me once.

I bit my lip.

At least I achieved my goal today. He
had promised me another film. That was enough for now. I would
climb higher. I would become famous. Once I stood at the top, his attention would belong to me naturally.

As for Bella... I believed Kane’s
kindness was nothing but a trap. The powerful always played cruel games. They lifted people up only to watch them fall harder.

I left the private room quietly, leaving Eric alone in the

room/

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Lucky Draw

ERIC'S POV

The room fell silent after Kathy left.

I reached into my pocket and took out a small silver bracelet. I stared at it for a long time as my thoughts drifted.

Kathy's words echoed in my mind, but they stirred memories much older.

A memory I never forgot.

Back then, I had been injured. My leg hurt so badly I could barely stand. I remembered sitting on the ground, terrified, unable to move.

She appeared out of nowhere.

A little girl who was younger than me.

She was way smaller. She had thin arms and messy hair.

"I'll carry you," she said, even though her eyes were red with fear.

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"You can't," I told her weakly. "I'm too **heavy**."

Lucky Draw

She crouched down anyway and pulled me onto her back. Her body trembled as she stood up.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "I'll carry you down the hill. We'll find the police."

Each step was slow. I could tell the action took every bit

of her strength. I could hear her breathing hard.

“You’re so heavy...” she muttered between breaths.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“It’s okay,” she said, forcing a smile. “When you’re better, you can carry me instead. Then we’ll be even.”

“Okay then”

“You’re okay, up there?” she asked. Her voice was filled with concern.

I smiled weakly “Yes. Thank you”

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Lucky Draw

Her back shook with fear, yet she kept going. She was the one who was scared, yet she comforted me.

I had never forgotten that moment.

“I’ll carry you in the future,” I promised her quietly back then. “I’ll protect you.”

The memory faded.

I closed my fingers around the bracelet.

Where was she now?

I often wondered what would have happened if I had not let go of her hand that day. If I had held on tighter, would she be standing beside me now?

Bella wasn’t her. I knew that.

And yet... something about her presence stirred

memories inside me

“Where are you?” I whispered into the empty room.

&69answer came back.

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Only silence.

Lucky Draw

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BELLA'S POV

I made time to go back to the hospital to submit my resignation in person. I didn't want rumors **or** misunderstandings. I wanted it clean and final. And the only way to ensure everything went well, was for me to do it myself.

The director looked up from his desk when he saw me. His expression shifted from surprise to confusion.

"You're leaving?" he asked. "Is there a problem? Are you unhappy with your salary? If s weeping is too tiring, I can move you to an office position."

I stood there quietly with my hands clasped together. His concern felt excessive. He was too concerned.

"There's no problem," I said calmly. "I just want to leave."

He leaned back, studying me. "You know, when your resignation request came in, I was shocked. At first, the staff had... opinions about you. But one phone call shut an of that down. Instantly."

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My heart sank slightly.

Lucky Draw

"I thought Alpha Damien Silverwood was backing you," he continued. "But I was told the person behind you is someone even the Silverwood family wouldn't dare offend." He paused. "And now you want to quit?"

I finally understood. That was why he was trying so hard to keep me. It wasn't kindness. It wasn't even concern. It was fear. He didn't want to be known as the reason I left.

He didn't want to offend anyone, let alone Stonewood.

That explained it.

"I appreciate the offer," I said evenly. "But I've made up my mind."

He sighed. "At least think about it."

"I already did," I replied.

There was nothing more to say. I bowed my head politely and left the office.

As I walked out of the hospital, I took a deep breath. The

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air felt lighter. Resigning lifted a heavy weight from my chest. I looked down at the envelope in my hand. I was given an extra month's salary. I knew where it came from.

If I still had pride, I would have returned it.

But reality was heavier than pride.

I needed the money more than ever before. My grandmother was still in the hospital. The money I borrowed from Tara wouldn't last long. There would be more bills, more medicine, more unexpected costs. I couldn't afford to be stubborn....or proud.

Before leaving, I went to find Jasmine.

She looked shocked when I told her. "You resigned?" she asked. "Bella, are you serious?"

"I am," I said.

"And you're really going to be a delivery rider?" Her brows knit together with worry.

"That's the plan."

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Lucky Draw

She sighed deeply. "That's going to be really tough. You'll be running around all day. It's harder than sweeping."

"I'm not afraid of hard work," I said with a small smile. "I'm only afraid of not having enough money."

She fell silent. She understood.

After saying goodbye, I left the hospital for good.

When I returned to the Stonewood Residence, the lights in the living room were on. Kan e was sitting on the sofa. His posture was relaxed. He looked like he had been expecting me.

"Come here," he said, extending his hand.

I hesitated for a second. The way he said it made my body react in a way I couldn't explain. His tone sent a small shiver down my spine. I took a deep breath before I walked toward him.

He took my hand gently and turned it over then he used Aisthumb to brush over the bandages. "Where were 20:54

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you?" he asked, already signaling for a servant. "Bring her medicine. And fresh bandages."

The servant bowed then left.

"I went to resign," I said honestly.

His eyes widened a bit. "You quit your job?"

"Yes."

"Looking for a new one?" His voice was calm. "I can help you."

“No,” I said softly. “I’ll find one myself.”

The air changed. From his expression, I could tell he didn’t like my answer. He expected me to let him help me but I didn’t want that.

His grip tightened just a little. “You don’t want my help?”

I took a breath and looked into his eyes. “I want to do it on my own.”

Betting him help would be easy, too easy. But when that

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Lucky Draw

ease disappeared, I would fall harder than before. I couldn’t depend on anyone. I had learned that the hard one.

We stared at each other. There was so much tension in the air. I could feel the air buzzing with sparks. Even the servant felt it. His hands shook as he placed the medicine down and hurried away.

Finally, Kane smiled a bit. “Fine. Do it your way.”

He carefully removed the bandage from my finger and applied ointment. He did it slowly. His touch was gentle

I watched him quietly. I could never understand him. One moment he was intense. He was mostly cold. The next minute, he was careful. It confused me most time s.

He lifted my finger, examining the scars. “I’ll have the hospital prescribe something. The se will fade.”

“It’s fine if they don’t,” I shrugged. “I’m used to them.”

“You may not care,” he said softly, “but I do.”

words made my chest tighten.

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Lucky Draw

"I want you unharmed," he continued. "Without a single scratch."

I almost laughed. After prison, after everything... unharmed felt impossible.

"My hand is almost healed," I said, changing the subject. "When can I go back to the cabin"

His expression darkened. "Are you that eager to leave?"

"I just prefer being alone."

He let out a short laugh. "Alone? I thought you said it felt good to rely on each other."

My lashes

trembled. I remembered every word. I remembered when I said that, when I made him promise that we would always be there for each other.

For a while, none of us said anything. The room was silent.

Then he spoke again. "You're leaving because you're healed. Does that mean you'd stay if you were hurt 7/9

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Lucky Draw

again?"

I looked up, shocked.

Before I could respond, he leaned forward. He raised one hand and cupped the back of my head. His lips pressed against mine without warning.

The world narrowed.

His kiss was deep and passionate. It was filled with so much emotions. I froze for a heartbeat–then melted. I couldn't help it.

My hands gripped his shirt as I kissed him back, just as fiercely.

His warmth surrounded me. His breath, his presence, his control – all of it overwhelmed me. But in the best way possible.

For that moment, there was no past, no future, no reason.

Only him.

Chapter 226

KATHY'S POV

Lucky Draw

I was on set that morning, standing under bright studio lights, surrounded by cameras, assistants, and makeup artists rushing around me. This movie was one Eric had personally secured for me, and everyone knew it.

The director greeted me with a wide smile the moment I arrived. "Good morning, Miss Kathy. You're glowing today," he said. His tone was flattering. I wasn't surprised.

The staff followed his lead. They called me "Miss Kathy," offered me water, adjusted my chair, and made sure I was comfortable. For once, I truly felt like a star.

I sat in my trailer while the stylist fixed my hair, watching myself in the mirror. My face looked flawless. My posture was confident. This was where I belonged – on screen, admired, envied. When I stepped onto the set, the crew paused for a moment. Some smiled, some whispered, but all eyes were on me. That feeling filled me with satisfaction. Whatever happened before, I told myself, 1/9 this was proof that I was still winning.

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Lucky Draw

During filming, I delivered my lines smoothly. The director nodded in approval several times. "Good, very good," he said. "That emotion – keep it."

Between takes, assistants rushed to dab my face and hand me my script. I laughed lightly, acting relaxed, but inside I felt proud. Eric hadn't abandoned me. I still had value.

When we finally broke for rest, I left the set to get some air. As I walked past a shaded corner near the equipment trucks, I heard voices. They were low, careless, the kind people used when they thought no one important was listening. I slowed my steps without thinking.

"Did you hear what happened on the other set?" a woman whispered.

"Of course," another replied. "Everyone knows now. That

—

actress Kathy – got humiliated. Alpha Stonewood made her kneel...right there on set.”

My fingers tightened around my phone. My heart skipped, then dropped.

“How did people even find out?” I muttered to myself.

2/9

20:55

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“That was supposed to be private.”

Just like they read my mind, one of them asked a question.

“How did you know about this?” someone asked.

Lucky Draw

“Nothing stays private in this industry,” someone else said with a laugh. “Besides, when someone as powerful as Kane Stonewood shows up, gossip spreads like wildfire. He did it for a woman. Did you know that? He defended her so fiercely”

They started talking about him then. Their voices. changed, filled with excitement.

“Have you seen him? He’s terrifying but so handsome.”

“I mean, he’s an Alpha, but not just any Alpha. Even the rich families don’t dare cross him.”

“I heard he destroyed a whole pack with one order.”

I felt heat rise to my face. Then my name came up again.

Kathy’s only where she is because she’s dating Eric, ‘20e5

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Lucky Draw

of them said bluntly. “She’s just a C-list actress. Without him, who would care?”

“And Eric changes women all the time,” another added. “She’s acting like she already won.”

I stepped forward before I even realized it.

"Since you're all so interested in my life," I said coldly, "why don't you say it to my face?"

They froze. Their expressions drained of color. One of them dropped her coffee cup. "Miss Kathy. We – we didn't know you were here."

I crossed my arms and looked at each of them slowly. "You didn't know, or you didn't care?" My voice stayed calm, but my chest burned with embarrassment "You're very brave when you think no one is listening."

They bowed their heads immediately. "We're sorry. Please forgive us. We were just talking nonsense."

I smiled even though my heart was racing inside. I did my best to keep a nonchalant expression. "Nonsense can still cost you your jobs," I said quietly. "This industry is small"

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Lucky Draw

A single word from me can make it even smaller for you."

Their eyes widened. One of them grabbed my sleeve. "Please, Miss Kathy. We didn't mean it. We won't talk again. Please."

I pulled my arm back and straightened my clothes.

"Then remember this feeling," I said. "And keep my name out of your mouths." I turned and walked away.,

But as I left, the satisfaction faded. In its place came jealousy. Bella's name echoed in my mind. Kane. Eric. I clenched my jaw.

Why was Bella always there, even when she wasn't present? Why did everything circle back to her?

When I got home later that evening, the house felt tense the moment I stepped inside. My mother was sitting stiffly on the couch. Her face was pale. My father stood near the window, silent and rigid.

stantly, I knew something was wrong.

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“What happened?” I asked.

My mother looked up. Her eyes were hollow “I was dismissed today.”

I froze. “What?”

Lucky Draw

“And your father,” she continued bitterly, “was demoted. From supervisor to ordinary staff.”

My eyes widened in surprise. Panic gripped me tightly. What the hell was going on?”

“That’s impossible,” I said sharply. “You both work in the public sector. That doesn’t just happen.” I swallowed hard. “Didn’t you tell them I’m Eric’s girlfriend?”

“Of course I did!” my mother snapped. “I told them proudly but my boss didn’t care. He said, ‘No matter who your daughter is dating, you leave today. There’s no discussion.’”

Her voice shook with rage as she continued. “And the humiliation – Kathy, you wouldn’t believe it. The same people who used to flatter me mocked me today. One 6/9

20:55

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Lucky Draw

woman laughed and said, ‘Even if your daughter supports you, who knows how long she’ll last? Eric changes girlfriends like tissues.’”

I felt my stomach twist.

“They all joined in,” she said through clenched teeth. “They kept saying things like ‘Marrying into a rich family isn’t easy.’ ‘Your daughter isn’t a socialite.’ They enjoyed it. Every word.”

“Just wait,” she said suddenly, gripping my hand. “When you marry Eric, I’ll walk back there as his mother-in-law and watch them beg.”

I wanted to agree like before. I wanted to believe it. But my chest felt tight. Lately, Eric barely talked about me. He only asked questions about my sister. The man hasn’t even kissed me yet. I was doing everything to please him but none of it seemed to be working.

My father finally spoke.

“What’s happening to this family?” he demanded. “We did nothing wrong. Why is everyone losing their jobs?” 7/9

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Lucky Draw

My mind raced with so many questions. Could someone be behind this? Then one name surfaced in my mind. The realization hit me hard.

“Bella,” I whispered.

They both looked at me.

“Remember when Dad burned her photo album?” I said slowly. “What if she told Kane? What if this is revenge?”

The room went silent. I could feel their minds processing it too. It made sense.

My father’s face darkened. “That ungrateful girl ruined us once by going to prison. Is she trying to destroy us again?”

My mother stood up, furious. “I’ll go find her myself.”

“No,” I said quickly. “Don’t act without thinking. Bella has Kane behind her now. If we rush in, we’ll only make things worse.”

99

They looked at me, waiting.

8/9

20:55

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Lucky Draw

“I’ll handle it,” I said quietly. My nails dug into my palms. “I won’t let Bella get closer to Eric. Not now. Not ever.”

I lifted my head, already thinking about my next move.

This wasn't over.

Coin Package: get more free bonus

get it

X

Chapter 227

BELLA'S POV

Tara met me at a quiet café.

The place smelled of burnt coffee and old paper, but it was private enough. She didn't even waste time on pleasantries. The moment I sat down, she slid a thick folder across the table toward me.

"Here's what I found on the witness," she said.

"Hello to you too" I muttered.

She sighed "Sorry. Hi. You know how I get when I haven't had my coffee"

I laughed "It's fine. What am I looking at?"

Her eyes were focused. "It's the information about the witness. My contact dug up every thing. His real name, his address, his job history, even his family members."

I opened the folder slowly. My fingers felt stiff. 1/8

20:55

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Lucky Draw

"He kept his last name," Tara continued, leaning closer. "Wright. But he changed his first name."

I looked up at her. "That's it?"

She smiled but it was bitter. "That's just the beginning." She tapped the folder. "When your case happened, he was nobody. He was just a regular guy. He had a girlfriend back then. They broke up because he couldn't even afford a house."

My chest tightened.

“But right after your trial,” Tara went on, her voice dropping, “he changed his name, left here and bought a five-million-dollar building in QL City. He paid cash. No mortgage.”

I froze. “Paid... cash?”

“Yes.” Her eyes darkened. “Unless he won the lottery, there’s no way a man like him could do that.”

My thoughts spun in different directions. I was doing my best to process what Tara was saying. Five million. Cash. After my trial. The timing felt too precise. It felt like 20:55

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someone was setting this up.

Lucky Draw

“How did you get all this?” I asked quietly. “You can’t find details like this just by chatting with colleagues.”

Tara sighed. “I got a general lead from a colleague. Then I hired a private detective.”

“A private detective?” I stared at her. “Tara... those aren’t cheap.”

She shot me a sharp look. “Now you’re worried about money?”

I lowered my gaze. I knew there was no arguing with Tara. When she set her mind on something then it was

set.

“The priority is clearing your name,” she said firmly. “Don’t worry about the cost.”

“But-”

“You weren’t like this before,” she interrupted. “Back then, you never counted who paid for what.”

3/8

20:55

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Lucky Draw

Her words stung because they were true. I gave a small, bitter smile. Back then, money meant nothing to me. I had a career and a bright future. I had a life that made sense. Now every bill felt like a threat. Every expense heavy.

felt

Everything was different now. I didn't have any money.

Tara suddenly stood and wrapped her arms around me. The hug was tight, like she knew I needed comfort.

"Bella," she said softly, "I've regretted it for years. I knew you were framed. I just couldn't find proof. Even when you were in prison, all I could do was visit and talk. I hated feeling useless."

My throat burned.

"Now that we have a lead," she continued, "I won't stop. I'll help you overturn this case. Don't think about owing me anything."

I hugged her back, pressing my face against her shoulder.

"You kept me alive in there," I said. "Your visits... they

were the only reason I didn't break. Even though I

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refused to see you, it made me happy to know that someone cared"

We pulled apart slowly, both of us wiping our eyes.

Lucky Draw

"I'll tell the detective to keep digging," Tara said after a moment. "But we have to be careful. Don't alert the witness."

"I know," I nodded. "If he senses danger, he'll never admit to lying."

After everything I had survived, waiting a little longer felt bearable.

I gathered the folder and stood. Tara picked up her bag. "I'm driving. I'll take you home."

I hesitated.

She noticed immediately. "You're still staying at Kane's place?"

"Yes," I said.

Lips pressed together without thinking. They still 20:55

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Lucky Draw

tingled from where we kissed. Thinking about it made my heart speed up.

Tara studied me. She raised her eyebrow "How long are you planning to stay there?"

"I don't know," I said with a shrug. "It's... not bad. I'm fed. I'm treated well."

She sighed. "Just tell me if you need help."

"I will."

We held hands as we walked toward the parking lot.

"Wait here," Tara said. "I'll get the car."

"Okay."

She headed toward the elevator. I stayed where I was, clutching the folder to my chest. Suddenly, a black car pulled in front of her. It stopped abruptly. In that moment, my view was blocked.

I know it's just a car pulling up but something about it felt wrong. I don't know why but my instincts were af0:55

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Lucky Draw

over the place. Something in my heart told me something was wrong but I didn't know what.

"Tara?" I called.

I heard a loud cry then a car door slammed. The engine roared. The car sped past me. I felt my heart sink into my stomach.

“Tara!” I shouted.

She was gone.

My heart stopped. I spun around, scanning the lot. Nothing. There was nobody there. The black car was already turning the corner. I ran after it as fast as I could. I was breathing heavily to the point that I could feel my breath tearing from my chest. I caught only part of the plate.

Three numbers. One letter.

Cold spread through my body.

Someone took her....right in front of my eyes. What the Kéß just happened?

20:56

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G

Lucky Draw

My hands shook as I reached for my phone. I wanted to call her, but fear stopped me.

What if calling made things worse?

I dialed the police instead. My voice trembled as I explained. After that, I ran to the security office. The cameras had to show something. Anything.

I stood there, shaking, staring at the screens.

Please be safe, Tara. Please.

I can’t lose her. The thought of it made my chest go tight.

“Please” I whispered to nobody in particular. Tears rolled down my face “Please, be safe”

B

Chapter 228

KANE'S POV

Lucky **Draw**

The phone rang, and the moment I answered, all I heard were sobs. Broken, breathless sounds that cut straight through my chest. My heart slammed hard against my ribs.

“Bella?” I said “What happened? Talk to me.”

“Kane... please,” she cried. “Help me find Tara. I’m begging you.”

Her voice shook so badly it felt like she was falling apart on the other end. I straightened immediately. Every sense of mine became alert. I had never heard her sound this helpless.

“What happened to Tara?” I asked.

“She was taken,” Bella said through her tears. “We went out then when we left, a black car pulled up in front of me. I couldn’t see. They took her right in front of me and I didn’t even know. I don’t know where they took her. I called 911. The police came, but the cameras were broken.

20:56

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They couldn’t do anything. Please... help me.”

Lucky Draw

I closed my eyes briefly. I could already picture her looking pale, stubbornly standing when she should have collapsed. I was scared for her. My chest ached at the sound of her crying.

“Where are you now?” I asked.

“I’m... in front of the police station.”

“Which one?”

“The one by Reigbon street”

“Go inside,” I said immediately. “Stay where it’s warm. I’m coming.”

By the time I arrived, she wasn’t inside. She was standing on the steps, clutching her phone like it was the only thing holding her together. Her face was stained with tears. Her eyes were swollen and red. The night air was cold, and even from a distance I could see how thin her 2da looked on her.

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Anger flared in me – not at her, but at the world.

Lucky Draw

I walked straight to her and took her hand. It was icy. Too cold.

“I told you to wait inside,” I said. “What are you doing out here?”

She lifted her head slowly, like it took all her strength. When she saw me, her eyes filled up with tears again. She looked so broken, so...scared. I had never seen Bella this terrified.

“Kane,” she said hoarsely. “Please help me find Tara. The police said they’ll investigate, but what if it’s too late? I should have remembered the plate number better. I should have-”

“Enough,” I said, holding her hand. “Breathe.”

Her fingers were clenched so hard around her phone that the veins stood out. I had seen her endure pain without a sound, but this fear was different. It shook her from the inside.

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20:56

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Lucky Draw

I watched her closely. The last time she had looked like this was when her grandmother was rushed into the hospital. Tara was not her blood, yet she was breaking just as badly

A feeling twisted in my chest. Jealousy. The feeling was ugly and unwanted.

For a moment, I wished she would feel this passionate about me. I knew it was insensitive to think like that but I couldn’t help it.

Would she ever look like this for me? If something happened to me, would she fall apart the same way?

My wolf stirred restlessly. He was filled with so much regret. If I had pulled her out of prison earlier, none of this would have happened. If I had been there sooner, she wouldn't have learned how cruel the world could be.

For one dangerous moment, a dark thought crossed my mind – keep her close, keep her safe, never let her be taken from me again. My wolf wanted to protect her so bad that he thought of locking her up and making her have my babies. That way, we would be together.

4/8

20:56

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Lucky Draw

No. The thought was at the back of my mind but I forced it down hard.

I couldn't do that. Or could I?

"Let's go home first," I said instead. "It's cold. Your hands are freezing."

"I don't feel it," she whispered. "Kane... will you help me find her? Please."

She looked at me like I was her last hope. I had never wanted to tear the world apart more than I did in that

moment.

"I need details before I move," I said calmly. "We'll talk on the way. I promise I'll look into it."

"But what if she's in danger right now?" she said, tears sliding down her cheeks. "Please. I know something's wrong."

"Are you sure?" I asked quietly. "No calls, no messages, no report from her family. It could still be nothing."

She would have called me," Bella said firmly. "Sne 20:56

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wouldn't disappear like this. I know her."

Her certainty silenced me.

“Do you care about her that much?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered without hesitation.

Lucky Draw

The word hit me harder than I expected. I felt that emotion again in my chest, twisting inside me. Still, I nodded.

“What if I refused to help?” I asked, testing myself more than her.

Her eyes widened. Her lips trembled. She looked like she might shatter.

I cursed inwardly. I regretted that question immediately. I shouldn’t have asked that. I couldn’t stand her like this. Seeing her afraid felt like something was clawing at my ribs.

I took out my phone and made the call.

/need someone found,” I said coldly. “Her name is Pará.6

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Lucky Draw

She was taken this afternoon. I want to know if she’s alive.”

I handed the phone to Bella. “Tell him everything.”

Her hands shook as she spoke. “It was a black Maybach. The plate number started with —” She listed everything she remembered, forcing herself to stay calm.

When she finished, I took the phone back. “Find her.

Now.”

I ended the call and looked at Bella. “All right. Let’s go.”

We walked to the car. I opened the door for her and waited until she sat. I leaned in, and she stiffened instantly. Her breath caught.

I reached past her and clicked the seatbelt into place.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

I didn't move away right away. I stayed close, watching her eyes flicker nervously. She kept looking at me.

Why were you staring at me like that?" I asked. 20:56

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Lucky Draw

She looked down, flustered. I lifted my hand and brushed my fingers lightly against her lips, right where I had kissed her earlier. I remembered how I gently bit her while we locked lips.

Fuck.

"It'll heal," I said. "Are you angry about that?"

She shook her head. "No. Thank you."

"For biting you?" I asked in a teasing tone.

"For helping me," she said. "For coming."

She finally looked up at me then. Her eyes were still wet but I could see how much she trusted me in them.

"You don't have to thank me," I said quietly. "I'm here."

Chapter 229

BELLA'S POV

Kane said nothing more. He straightened, closed the car door walked around the front of the car, and took the driver's seat. The engine started smoothly.

I raised my eyebrows without meaning to. It felt strange seeing him drive. He always had someone else do it. Seeing him like this felt different.

I sat in the passenger seat and found myself watching him. From this angle, his face looked even more perfect. He had the most perfect side view I had ever seen.

His jaw was firm. His eyes were focused. His lips were set in a calm line that made it hard to guess what he was thinking. His hair was slightly messy, a few

strands falling over his forehead. It reminded me of the time before everything changed, when he was just Kane, not Alpha Stonewood, not someone people feared or whispered

about.

Right now, he was the only person I could rely on. 1/8

20:58

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Lucky Draw

I wanted to find Tara as fast as possible. The police were involved, but I still felt it wasn't enough. I wanted more people searching, more eyes, more chances. I kept thinking that if we moved faster, if we pushed harder, Tara would come back sooner. I was so worried about her. I hoped she was okay.

The car stopped at a red light. Kane glanced at me sideways.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Why are you staring at me?"

I startled. I hadn't realized I'd been looking at him for so long. Heat rushed to my face.

"Oh nothing," I said quickly. "I was just... wondering why you're driving today."

He shrugged "I felt like it."

His eyes darkened slightly when he looked back at me. Something about that look made my heart skip.

"Do you want to know the real reason?" he asked.

My chest tightened. His tone made me nervous, as if the 58

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Lucky Draw

answer would pull me somewhere I wasn't ready to go.

"The light's green," I blurted out, pointing forward.

He looked ahead, then back at me. He smiled a bit. He didn't press the issue. The car moved forward, and silence filled the space between us. It wasn't uncomfortable, but it was heavy.

My thoughts kept circling back to Tara, over and over. I kept praying that she was okay wherever she was.

When we arrived at the Stonewood residence, I got out of the car quickly.

“When will we hear something about Tara?” I asked.

I tried to sound calm, but my voice betrayed me. I was scared inside.

“It hasn’t been long,” Kane said “My people will call as soon as they know anything.”

Only half an hour had passed, but it felt endless. It felt like forever. I remembered the cases I’d studied back then 3h8w time worked against missing women. Every min NHS

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mattered. I clenched my fists.

She’ll be fine. She has to be.

Lucky Draw

I looked at Kane without blinking. I didn’t care if I looked desperate. I was desperate.

“If you’re that anxious,” he said after a moment, “stay with me. If there’s news, you’ll hear it immediately.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

I just hadn’t expected where that would lead.

Five minutes later, I was standing in Kane’s room.

It wasn’t my first time there, but it felt different entering through the main door instead of the connecting one. The room was quiet and dark. The whole place smelled like him. Kane walked in, removed his coat, and placed his phone on the coffee table.

My eyes lingered on the phone. It was the same one I had bought him long ago. I swallowed. He still used it. That was why my call had gone through so fast.

4/8

20:58

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Lucky Draw

Why? There was no need for him to use it. It was cheap. It was nothing compared to the phones he used or could afford.

Before I could think more about it, I noticed he was loosening his shirt.

My face heated instantly. "Why... why are you—"

"Changing clothes," he said calmly. "You've seen it before."

"That's not the same," I muttered.

He raised an eyebrow. "You used to watch me without complaining."

I didn't know what to say. He was right, but back then, things were simpler. I turned my back quickly, feeling my heart racing.

The sound of fabric shifting behind me made my nerves tighten. I stared at the wall, telling myself to focus. I was here because Tara was missing. Nothing else mattered. But my body betrayed me the way it always did when

she was near me.

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8

Lucky Draw

Then arms wrapped around me from behind.

I gasped softly. His embrace was firm but gentle. His arms felt familiar in a way that made my chest ache. His body was warm. I had the urge to lean into him and rest my head against his chest. It took every self control inside me to stop myself.

"Won't you look at me, Bella?" he asked quietly.

"There's nothing to see," I said, even though my heart said otherwise.

"You didn't used to think so."

I cursed my past self. "Are you done changing?"

He chuckled softly. "Turn around and see."

Before I could protest, his hands guided me. I turned, and my fingers brushed against his chest by accident.

He was shirtless.

My breath caught. My eyes shut on instinct. I could feel

6/8

20:58

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my face burning.

"You—"I couldn't finish.

Lucky Draw

"Open your eyes," he murmured. His voice was close, too close. "I'm not dangerous to you."

"Hurry up and put something on," I whispered.

"I'd rather you look," he said calmly. "I helped you today. Is that too much to ask?"

My lips parted. My heart pounded so loudly I was sure he could hear it. I bit my lip without thinking and winced when I touched the spot he'd bitten earlier.

I heard his soft laugh. His fingers lifted my chin and brushed over my lips.

"You looked cute just now," he said.

Cute.

Before I could respond, I felt his lips on mine. I gasped

into his mouth in shock.

7/8

20:58

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My mind went blank.

Lucky Draw

The kiss wasn't rushed. It was slow, like he was giving me time to pull away. I didn't. My body reacted before my thoughts caught up. My hands clutched his arms. Heat spread through me, melting my fear and the tension inside me.

For a moment, Tara disappeared from my thoughts. There was only him. His breath. His closeness. The way my heart answered his without permission.

And I knew, deep down, that once I crossed this line, nothing between us would ever be simple again.

Write your comment

Chapter 230

BELLA'S POV

The kiss went on far longer than I expected.

My eyes flew open, startled, only to find his face impossibly close to mine.

I couldn't help but melt into him as our lips moved together. His lips tasted sweet, too sweet.

"Umm..." I tried to speak, but he deepened the kiss, and all my words vanished.

My hands pressed against his chest and I could feel the heat radiating from him. A warm feeling spread through me that had nothing to do with the cold night. Every nerve in my body seemed to come to life, electrified by his touch.

The softness of his lips, the gentle touch of his hands, the passion of the kiss – it all overwhelmed me in the best

way.

When the kiss finally ended, I was left panting. My cheeks

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were hot.

Kane, however, remained perfectly calm.

Lucky Draw

"Is this the only way I can get you to look at me?" His voice was low. His voice was filled with a hint of desire that made my pulse race. I froze, unsure of what to say. My head was still reeling from the kiss.

He leaned closer then added, "I've helped you, and you won't even look at me?"

My heart skipped again. I pressed my lips tighter, trying to compose myself.

"Get dressed, and I'll look at you," I whispered.

"I like it when you look at me like this," he murmured. His voice was soft but powerful, magnetic. "As if I'm the only one in your eyes."

I couldn't deny it. I was caught, staring at him myself. His gorgeous dark eyes, the small scars on his neck, the power he radiated – all of it pulled my attention completely.

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20:59

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Lucky Draw

My eyes dropped to the scar across his chest. I had seen it at the cabin once. He told me it was nothing serious.

He noticed my gaze and slowly took my hand, placing it over the scar. My body tensed immediately, trying to pull back, but his grip was firm.

"You were looking at the scar, weren't you? Why not just touch it?"

"No need... Let go of my hand first," I said quickly.

He ignored me, holding my hand and watching me closely, as if he could read every thought in my mind.

"Are you going to hurt me, Bella?" he asked.

His question made my heart skip a beat. I couldn't speak. The room felt smaller and hotter. The air was electric with tension.

"Is that a difficult question?" he muttered after a long pause. Then he leaned close till his lips touched the shell of my ear. The action made me shiver.

Never hurt me, all right?" he whispered.

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My chest tightened at the sound. Could I? Would I ever dare hurt someone like him?

I shifted slightly. My mind raced with thoughts of Tara.

Even in this moment, I couldn't ignore my best friend's danger. My phone sat on the table.

Kane, now dressed in casual clothes, sat nearby, reviewing reports. I studied him, remembering his warning. Someone like him didn't rely on threats. He was Alpha, in every sense, even in casual clothes.

"Are you thinking about me or Tara?" Kane asked suddenly. His voice broke through my thoughts.

I hesitated. My eyes dropped to my lap.

"Mostly Tara," I admitted, though my mind had wandered to him more than I wanted to admit.

I knew better than to reveal that now. He was dangerous, commanding, and I still needed his help.

Kane's phone rang. My eyes immediately found it on the coffee table. It was eleven p.m. already. He glanced at the 4/7

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caller ID and answered then switched on speakerphone.

A man's voice came through clearly: "We've found her,

Alpha Stonewood. Tara was taken by Thomas Sulkin. She's likely at his house in Newport now."

Kane's expression turned even more serious "Thomas? Are you sure?"

“Yes, no mistake. He took her today.”

With that, Kane hung up.

I blinked, confused. “Thomas? Who is he?”

“He’s the chairman of Sulkin Group and the Alpha of the Sulkins,” Kane explained, “Haven’t you heard of him? Didn’t Tara ever mention him?”

I shook my head. Tara never mentioned Thomas. But I knew of the Sulkin Group. They were a massive shipping conglomerate with influence reaching far beyond Byron City. My stomach sank. Tara had been involved with someone powerful and ruthless, someone I knew nothing

about.

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“I’m going to find her myself!” I blurted, spinning to leave.

Kane’s voice stopped me. “And how exactly do you plan to get inside?”

“I... I’ll ask the police to take me with them,” I said in an unsure tone. Even I didn’t know how I was going to pull

that off.

He walked toward me slowly. “That won’t work. You don’t know Thomas like I do. He has a hundred ways to keep you away.”

I turned to him. I was desperate now. “Then... can you help me? Please. I have to see Tara, find out why he took her.”

He studied me. He narrowed his eyes at me. “Thomas won’t harm her. But you..... you’re different. You have no idea what you’re stepping into.”

I swallowed hard. “I don’t care. I have to see her.”

“I can take you. But why should I? I’ve already found her, and she’s not in danger. I’m a businessman; I don’t take59

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unnecessary risks.”

I bit my lip. I started to feel panic. What do I do to convince him?.

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I had nothing to offer him—
no money, no influence, just myself. My trembling fingers moved to my shirt, undoing the buttons slowly. My pale skin was a bit exposed.

“Please... take me to see Thomas. I need to see Tara with my own eyes. I’ll... I’ll do anything.”

Kane’s eyes darkened, watching me intently.

I couldn’t look away. Every nerve in me was tight. I was exposed, vulnerable, pleading.

And he held the power to grant or deny me.

“I’ll-” I took in a deep breath “I’ll sleep with you”