

# Through Rising Fog We Walk Paths Unknown Yet Comforting

Chapter 251

TARA'S POV

I hurried to the location my mother had mentioned. The supermarket entrance was busy with people going in and out with carts and bags.

My eyes scanned the area until I saw a man standing near the door, glancing around as if he was waiting for someone. He looked very much like the photo my mother had shoved into my face earlier – neatly dressed, hair carefully styled and a formal posture.

My heart thumped. That must be him.

I took out my phone and dialed the number my mother had saved under “Liam. Don't Be Late.” A second later, the man's phone rang. He looked down at it, then up at me.

Got you, I thought.

Then, I forced my legs to move.

I walked up to him and cleared my throat. “Mr. Liam Franco? Hi. I'm Tara.”

“Hello,” he said. He looked me up and down without any attempt to hide it. His eyes stayed on me just long enough.

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make me uncomfortable.

I inhaled, ready to get this over with. “Well... I wanted to tell you that I-”

“Why don't we take a walk?” he interrupted calmly. “There's a small park nearby. Let's go there.”

The park?

I blinked and glanced at the sky. It was already getting dark and my stomach gave a small growl. "Don't you want to eat first?" I asked. "It's almost dinner time. Restaurants will get crowded later."

"I'm not hungry," he replied flatly. "Let's talk first."

Something about his tone made it sound less like a suggestion and more like a decision. I hesitated, then followed him

anyway.

Just be polite, I told myself. Say your piece then leave.

The park was small and quiet, with dim lights lining the path. The moment we sat down, Liam turned to me. The expression

on his face turned serious.

"How old are you, Miss Banks?" he asked.

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Miss Banks? So....formal. How old was he? A century?

"Twenty-six," I replied.

"Your parents' occupations?"

"My father is retired. My mother is... very enthusiastic,"

"What about your job? Your education? Which school did you attend? How were your grades?"

I stared at him, answering one question after another. I felt my patience thinning with every minute. He barely reacted to my responses. He would just simply nod then move on, as if he was ticking boxes on an invisible form.

Is this an interview? I wondered bitterly.

Then he asked, "Have you ever been in a relationship, Miss Banks?"

I opened my mouth in shock. "Well, excuse me, Mr. Liam, I-

"I don't like my girlfriend to have had too many boyfriends," he continued smoothly. "I also prefer she doesn't have much experience in that area. Honesty is important. That way, there won't be misunderstandings later."

I froze.

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My chest felt tight. I felt irritated by his question. We had just met, and he was already talking as if I were his possession. I forced a tight smile. "I think there's been a misunderstanding here-

"Well then," a cold voice cut in "I'd like to hear what this misunderstanding is."

My blood ran cold. That voice was familiar, too familiar. No....it couldn't be.

I turned around slowly.

Thomas stood there.

He looked incredibly handsome as always. His presence was overwhelming even in the dim park lights. His expression was calm, but his eyes were dark and unreadable. My heart dropped straight into my stomach.

"Why... why are you here?" I asked.

"Did you come here with another man because you thought I wouldn't show up?" he asked casually. Still, his tone was dangerous.

It felt like a thunderbolt struck me. Of all days. Of all places.

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I swallowed hard. I wasn't sure if it was a joke or a threat.

But one thing was clear.

Things had just gotten a lot more complicated.

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TARA'S POV

"You have to promise me" Thomas said again.

I looked at Thomas and said softly, "It won't happen again."

I felt confused. What were we doing?. If he wanted revenge on me, shouldn't he first make me fall in love with him? That was how it always worked in movies and dramas. The male lead would act kind and patient. He would treat the woman like a delicate treasure, then break her heart at the end. But Thomas

did none of that. I didn't feel treasured at all. I felt like I was walking beside a dangerous animal, one wrong step away from getting hurt.

Instead, he was threatening me.

Thomas seemed satisfied with my answer. He nodded turned to walk away. I panicked for a second and hurried after him, afraid he might leave me behind.

My nerves were still tight, and then my stomach betrayed me. It growled loudly.

Thomas stopped and looked at me. "Are you hungry?"

I felt embarrassed as I pressed a hand to my stomach

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"A little," I admitted.

He didn't tease me or smile. His face stayed composed, but that somehow made me feel less awkward. Gathering **my** courage, I pointed toward the street ahead. "There are a lot of good restaurants around here. Why don't we eat nearby?"

He looked at me from the corner of his eye. I knew that look. My eyes must have been shining. Food always did that to me. When we were abroad before, I had dragged him around to try every local dish I could find. I remembered pestering him with questions, begging him to take me to street stalls and hidden

restaurants.

After a brief pause, he said, "Okay."

Joy burst inside me like fireworks. I smiled without realizing it wide and bright, unable to hide my happiness. I probably looked like a child who had just been promised dessert.

Thomas followed me as I led him to a restaurant I liked. It was warm inside, filled with the smell of sizzling food. The lights were soft, and the place felt lively. I felt myself relax for the first time that evening.

"This place has dishes you can't find anywhere else," I said eagerly as I picked up the menu. I flipped through it quickly and began ordering without hesitation. "This one is their

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specialty, and this is really good too. Oh, and you have to try this it looks ordinary, but it tastes amazing."

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I kept talking. I felt my excitement building with every dish. Halfway through, I suddenly noticed Thomas watching me quietly. His eyes were focused on me. It suddenly made me self-conscious.

"Sorry. I'm talking too much," I said awkwardly.

"It's fine," he replied with a small smile "Go on. I'm listening."

His words were simple, but they caught me off guard. I hesitated, suddenly unsure of what else to say. Without thinking, I asked, "Why were you here today?"

The moment the question left my mouth, I regretted it. I had just escaped the topic of the blind date, and now I had dragged it back into the open.

Thomas's eyes darkened a bit as he looked at me.

"If I hadn't shown up," he asked slowly, "would you have had dinner with that man?"

My face flushed hot with embarrassment. "Why would I do that??" I said quickly, though guilt gripped me. I

had planned to invite that man to dinner as an apology. The thought made me uncomfortable now. But I couldn't tell Thomas that. 3/7

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Thinking about the rude things Liam said, I felt angry again. I should have slapped him myself, I thought bitterly.

Thomas leaned back "What exactly are your parents looking for in a son-in-law?"

"Nothing special," I shrugged

"They want someone with a stable job, his own place, and at least five foot seven," I continued. "Basic requirements." I paused and sighed. "Honestly, I don't care about the house part. Renting is fine. A couple can always save up and buy a place together after marriage."

I thought of my mother's loud voice. She always said that at twenty-eight, I still had the right to be picky but if I waited too long, I would have to lower my standards. Her words always made me feel small and anxious.

I hated that kind of thinking. A woman's value shouldn't be tied to her age. I knew many capable women who found love later in life. But my mother never listened.

"They succeed because they have everything," she had said

once with a sneer. "Money, beauty, top education. What do you have?"

"I have a college degree," I had replied weakly back then.

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"Worthless," she had scoffed. "You could have studied abroad for your master's, but you ran back for Bella. Now you just draw logos all day."

The memory made my chest ache. I never regretted coming back for Bella. She needed me. Some friendships mattered more than degrees or status. Still, I hadn't been able to help her enough. Bella went to prison for three years, and that guilt stayed with me all the time.

"What are you thinking about?" Thomas's voice pulled me back.

I blinked and looked at him. "I was thinking of..." My voice trailed off as a sudden thought hit me.

Thomas was the head of the Sulkin family now. He had power, connections, and resources I could never reach. If anyone could help investigate Bella's case, it was him.

I felt hopeful for the first time in a long time. I looked at him like he was my only lifeline.

"I know I've wronged you," I said carefully. "I admit everything you said. I'll do whatever you want. But... could you do me a small favor while we're dating?"

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"A favor?" he asked, clearly surprised. "What kind of favor?"

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I took a breath and explained everything about Bella, about the wrongful conviction and the new clues. I spoke quickly, afraid he would refuse before I finished.

Thomas frowned. "She's close to Alpha Stonewood. Why not ask him?"

"Bella doesn't know I'm asking you," I said. "She didn't ask Kane because..." I hesitated, then said softly, "She was accused of poisoning his fiancée, Sophia Monroe."

Thomas chuckled quietly.

"What's funny?" I asked, frowning.

"I just find their situation interesting," he replied "How do you know she didn't do this?"

"I trust Bella," I said firmly. "She would never do that."

He looked at me seriously. "Do you trust her that much?"

“She’s my best friend,” I said. “If I don’t trust her, who should I trust?”

“What about me?” he asked suddenly.

My heart skipped. I hesitated, then smiled. “Of course I trust

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you.”

He studied me for a long moment, then nodded. “Give me the clues later. I’ll have someone look into it.”

I felt so relieved that I almost passed out. I grabbed his hands without thinking.

“Thank you!” I said happily.

Due to how happy and bubbly I was, I leaned forward and kissed him....right on the lips!

The moment I pulled back, I froze. My heart pounded. Our eyes met. We looked straight into each other’s eyes.

Then he leaned in again, and this time, he kissed me. The kiss was deeper. It was filled with heat and passion.

The world seemed to fade away.

And that was where the night ended.

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Chapter 253

ERIC’S POV

I leaned back against the leather seat of the car and closed my eyes for a moment, pressing my fingers to my temples.

I had such a long day. Just as I was about to drift into my thoughts, my Beta's phone vibrated.

He answered at once. After talking for a few minutes, he turned toward me.

"Sir, the jewelry store called about Miss Jameson's selections" he said "The full set costs twenty million dollars. The owner wanted confirmation before finalizing it. Should I approve it?"

Twenty million. I barely thought about the number.

"Let her have them," I said calmly.

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My Beta paused for half a second. He was clearly surprised by

lack of hesitation, then nodded and relayed my approval. Still, I noticed the look on his face. He was thinking what anyone with common sense would think.

Kathy had been spending too freely.

Lately, Kathy had been visiting luxury stores one after another,

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swiping my card to buy jewelry, dresses, handbags and any other expensive item she could get her hands on. She was too fast, too eager. Women like that usually burned bright and burned out fast.

I had cut off countless women for far less. Yet with Kathy, I hadn't bothered to stop her.

"Miss Jameson has run up close to thirty million so far," My Beta added carefully. "I thought you should know."

"Is that so?" I asked lightly. "Why are some people so desperate?"

"She's probably afraid of losing this chance. Opportunities like this don't come often."

"What a bore," I muttered, looking out the window "They rush so much, yet often end up with nothing."

Thirty million meant nothing to me. Apart from being wealthy, I liked to spoil my women. I had always believed money was a fair exchange for their time. But Kathy's approach irritated me a bit. Other women wanted my money too, but they played the game with grace. They didn't make it so obvious. They didn't treat me like an ATM machine.

Not that it truly mattered. Kathy was never meant to matter.

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I kept her around for one reason to know more about Bella.

She was just a means to an end for me. At first, Kathy was just useful. Her lips reminded me of someone from my past. A little girl who had once pulled me back from the edge when no one else had cared. Over time, that resemblance blurred into something else. Whenever I felt restless or irritated, listening to Kathy talk about Bella strangely calmed me.

Bella was not that girl. I knew that.

Yet... every time I saw her, something pulled at me.

Maybe it was her eyes or how strong she was, or the way she worked without complaint, sweeping streets others wouldn't even walk on. I treated her differently without meaning to. I noticed her more than I should have.

Still, Kane was interested in her.

I had no intention of crossing that line. She wasn't the person I was searching for. I told myself that again and again.

The car passed a familiar street. I looked at the sidewalk. This was where Bella usually worked. I scanned the road, the corners, the shadows, looking for her.

She wasn't there.

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The car moved on, but my eyes stayed there far longer than it should have. I felt disappointed for some reason. How come she wasn't here?

Was it her day off? Or had something happened?

I frowned, feeling annoyed with myself. Since when did I care enough to speculate like this? I had never thought so much about a woman except for the girl in my memories.

The traffic light turned red. I was just about to look away when something caught my eye.

An electric bike stopped at the line.

The rider was slender, wearing a delivery uniform. She had a large "Jazz's Kitchen" box strapped behind her. The figure looked familiar. My heart skipped before my mind caught up.

Bella.

Before I could say anything, the light turned green. The bike turned right and disappeared into the flow of traffic.

"Follow that bike," I said.

The driver hesitated. "Sorry, sir. We can only go straight. Traffic's too heavy."

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I let out a low laugh, shaking my head at myself. What was wrong with me?

Was I really about to chase a woman through traffic just to confirm what I already knew? It was ridiculous. She was just a woman. Kane's woman, at that.

I leaned back and closed my eyes. "Take me back to the office."

I took the silver bracelet hanging from the platinum chain around my neck, rolling it round my fingers.

That day... the moment I let go of her hand. Had I lost her forever because of it?

The girl who saved me had become nothing more than memory. She was just out of reach. Somewhere along the way, searching for her had stopped being a memory and turned into an obsession.

#### KATHY'S POV

I stood in front of the mirror, staring at the

twenty-million-dollar necklace resting against my collarbone. The diamonds sparkled brightly and for a moment, I felt invincible.

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This was my worth now.

I was no longer ordinary.

That day, I joined a new film crew as the female lead. The production wasn't top-tier, and the director lacked fame, but I didn't mind. With Eric behind me, roles would keep coming. As long as I stayed in his good graces, my future was secure.

Still, something bothered me.

Every time Eric asked me out, he only wanted to talk about Bella.

I had told him everything I knew. Her habits, her past, her prison years. Sometimes, I couldn't shake the feeling that he was keeping me around only for that reason. It made me feel

uneasy.

But Bella had Kane now.

Eric was famously picky. Everyone knew he refused to date women with real romantic histories. I had never officially dated anyone. Bella, on the other hand, had been with Damien Silverwood and was now involved with Kane Stonewood.

Someone like Eric would never choose a woman like that. That was what I told myself.

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I walked into a high-end club that night. Inside the private room, Eric sat with several men. He had a drink in his hand.

Women hovered around him like moths to a flame.

I moved closer at once. I smiled brightly at him.

“Sorry I’m late, Eric,” I said softly. “Did I keep you waiting?”

One of the men laughed. “Mr. Simpson had to drink with me because his girlfriend wasn’t here.”

I smiled, pleased.

“Is the necklace nice?” I asked, lifting my chin so the diamonds caught the light. “Thank you for it.”

The surrounding women froze. Their eyes locked onto the necklace with shocked expressions. One by one, they withdrew. The jealousy was clear on their faces.

I smiled to myself. Message received.

They started leaving. As they walked out, the women glared at

1. me.

When the room was finally empty, I sat close to Eric.

“Eric, do you mind that I wanted something so expensive?” I

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bit my lip, letting my voice soften. “I just don’t want to embarrass you.”

Eric looked at me lazily.

“Keep what you bought,” he said flatly. “But if you’re worried about embarrassing me...”

He paused then his eyes got darker.

“Then maybe you should reflect on your behavior.” He said.

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### KATHY’S POV

Eric’s words stunned me.

They landed hard enough to knock the breath out of my chest. I stood there, frozen, replaying them again and again in my mind.

Think about your behavior.

What did he mean by that? Was he saying I was embarrassing him? Was he warning me? Or was he already tired of me?

My confident smile cracked. For the first time since I started dating him, doubt crept into my heart. I suddenly felt exposed, like I had been stripped of my carefully built image and left standing bare in front of him.

Before I could gather my thoughts, Eric spoke again. His tone was casual but dangerous. “By the way, do you know what your sister is doing for work now?”

My heart skipped. Why was he asking about Bella again?

I hesitated, then answered quickly. “Isn’t she working at the Sanitation Center?”

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Eric let out a cold chuckle. “It seems you don’t care much about your sister.”

The words sent a chill down my spine. Why did he care so much?

“Well...” I forced a laugh. “Bella never liked staying at home. Besides, she’s with Kane now, so I guess her life isn’t too bad.”

I deliberately mentioned Kane. I knew Eric disliked women who had been with other men. As expected, his eyes narrowed slightly. He fell silent, lost in thought, and didn’t continue the

topic.

I felt so relieved.

When we finally left the club, I followed him closely into the car. He had drunk more than usual tonight. His movements were slower, his eyes darker. I didn’t mind at all. In fact, I welcomed it.

This might be my chance.

When the car stopped in front of Eric’s private mansion, I spoke quickly. “I’ll help him inside. Let me take care of him.”

The driver looked at me. He hesitated for only a second before nodding. Everyone knew I was Eric’s girlfriend. He wouldn’t dare offend me.

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Inside the mansion, the place was quiet. I helped Prie upstairs, wrapping my arm around his waist. He was drunk, but not helpless. Still, he allowed me to guide **him** into his bedroom.

“Let me help you change,” I said softly. I kept **my** voice sweet and careful. “You’ll sleep better.”

He lay back on the bed with one arm draped over his eyes. I reached for the buttons of his shirt, my heart racing. We hadn’t even kissed before. That fact had always unsettled me.

If something happens tonight...

The thought made my pulse quicken. If I got pregnant, everything would be settled. I would marry into the Simpson family. No one could push me aside then.

As I pulled his shirt open, my fingers touched something hard. I froze.

It was the silver bracelet.

I stared at it, resting against his chest. It was simple. Ordinary even. There was nothing special at all. Yet, he treated it like a priceless treasure.

I became even more curious about it. I lifted it slightly to examine it but then-

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Pain exploded through my wrist. A strong hand clamped down on mine, forcing me to let go. I gasped and looked up.

Eric was staring at me. His eyes were clear. He looked completely sober.

“Don’t touch this,” he said coldly.

“I— I’m sorry,” I stammered in fear. “I just wanted to help you. I didn’t mean anything. Please... let go...”

The pain became unbearable. Sweat formed on my forehead.

He released me abruptly then lay back down, closing his eyes. “You should go.”

“But I want to take care of you,” I insisted weakly. “You’re drunk, and the servants-”

“Go,” he interrupted. “Don’t make me repeat myself.”

My hands trembled. I knew I had lost. I swallowed my anger and humiliation and left his room silently.

Slowly, I walked down the hallways. I felt disappointed. If I hadn’t been so stupid, maybe I could have gotten him to sleep with me. I could have gotten pregnant tonight.

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As I walked through the mansion, something caught my eye – A painting.

I stopped in front of the atelier door. Earlier, when I had tried to enter, Eric had stopped me. Now, curiosity overwhelmed me. I pushed the door open.

Inside, my breath caught. There was a portrait on the wall.

It was Bella. Not as an adult but as a child.

The painting showed a little girl carrying a boy on her back. The floral dress she wore was unmistakable. I had seen it in

Bella's old photo album.

My hands shook.

Why was there a painting of Bella here? What was Eric's connection to her?

I was scared at this point. The thought that Bella might take everything I had worked for made my chest tighten painfully.

No.

I wouldn't allow it.

I was Eric's girlfriend. I was meant to marry into the Simpson family. No one – especially not Bella – was going to steal that 5/8

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from me.

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BELLA'S POV

I returned to Stonewood Residence quietly and walked toward Kane's bedroom. I hesitated before knocking.

A few seconds later, the door opened.

Kane stood there in a bathrobe. His hair was damp from a shower. Water fell from his dark strands and slid down his neck. My heart skipped at the sight of him.

"Um... goodnight," I said softly, already turning to leave.

Before I could step away, he caught my arm and pulled me inside.

“Is that all you came to say, Bella?” he asked.

I pressed my lips together and looked at him. I had only come to say goodnight. That was the truth.

He sighed and wrapped his arms around me, pulling me close. His face buried into the crook of my neck. His breath was warm against my skin.

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“I missed you,” he murmured. “I thought about you all day.”

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My heart fluttered painfully. Warmth spread through my chest, mixing with something heavy inside me.

“Bella,” he whispered. “Did you miss me?”

I bit my lip. My body reacted before my mind could catch up. I couldn’t answer. It felt as if my throat

“It’s only you.” He whispered

The words sent a shock through my body.

“Help me dry my hair,” he said, handing me a towel.

I hesitated as he lowered his head in front of me.

“What’s the matter?” he asked “Didn’t you always do it back at the cabin?”

Things were different now. Still, I lifted the towel and began drying his hair. With his face covered, I felt braver. He sat quietly, letting me fuss over him.

For a moment, I felt powerful. As if this dangerous man was placing himself in my hands.

What am I thinking?

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If Kane wanted to, he could destroy me without effort.

“Done,” I said, pulling the towel away.

His hair was messy now. He had dark strands falling over his eyes. He looked at me through them. My breath caught.

Without thinking, I reached out and brushed his hair back.

His eyes met mine.

They were cold and intense but softened as they looked at me, as if I were the only thing he could see.

And in that moment, I felt it clearly.

The tension. The pull. The dangerous, undeniable chemistry between us.

The world outside disappeared in that moment.

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BELLA'S POV

My mind snapped back to the present. I realized my hand was still on Kane's hair. I tried to pull away, afraid of how close we were, afraid of myself.

Before I could retreat, Kane caught **my** wrist.

He guided my hand back and pressed it against his cheek. His skin was warm, too warm. My breath stuttered.

“What's wrong?” he asked in a low, rough voice. “Don't you like my face anymore? Didn't you say before that I was so handsome you'd never get tired of looking at me?”

As he spoke, he rubbed his cheek lightly against my palm, like he was craving my touch. The gesture was intimate, way too intimate.

I regretted my careless words from before. I regretted saying anything that could give him this kind of confidence.

My cheeks burned. Heat spread from my face down my neck. I turned my head away, unable to look at him anymore. Looking at him only made my thoughts messier and my emotions harder to control.

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I tried to focus on something else, anything else at all. That was when my eyes landed on his desk.

There was an empty bowl there. Its inside was stained dark brown. My doctor's instincts reacted before my fear did.

"Is that herbal medicine?" I asked quietly.

"Yes," Kane answered simply.

I turned back to him, surprised. "Are you not feeling well?"

He smiled. It wasn't his usual cold or mocking smile. It looked... pleased. Almost proud. Like a child showing off something he did right.

"It's for my stomach," he said calmly. "Didn't you tell me to take better care of my health? I'm doing exactly what you said."

For a moment, I didn't know how to respond. He looked at me expectantly, waiting.

Should I praise him? Should I say nothing?

"Well..." I hesitated, then spoke softly. "That's good. Keep it up."

His eyes glowed like he truly valued those simple words.

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"I'll listen to you," he said. Then he tilted his head slightly. "So tell me. Are you willing to like me?"

The question hit me harder than I expected. My heart faltered.

he had not been Alpha Stonewood. If he had not been the man who haunted my three years in prison like a shadow I could never escape... then maybe I could have answered differently.

But he was Alpha Stonewood

During those three years behind cold walls and locked doors, his name alone filled me with fear. He was power. He was the reason I learned how small a person could feel.

Even now, my emotions twisted painfully. Part of me wanted to step back, to run far away from him. He still terrified me.

And yet... when I saw him take medicine because of my words, when his eyes softened and his voice lowered only for me, I felt confused.

Was this another game? Another way to trap me?

Or did he mean it?

What frightened me most was not him. It was myself. I no longer understood my own heart.

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"I don't know," I said honestly. "I really don't know."

He didn't look disappointed. Instead, Kane stepped closer.

The space between us disappeared. I could feel his breath against my lips. My instincts screamed at me to move, but my body refused to listen.

"It's fine," he murmured. "You don't need to know now."

His eyes darkened. His voice lowered even more.

"You'll be mine one day." He whispered.

The words were soft, but they crashed into me hard.

I gasped. Shock ran through my body. The feeling was electric. My heart pounded so hard it almost hurt.

"Kane-" I started, but my voice faltered.

He lifted his hand, brushing his thumb lightly against my jaw, stopping me. His touch was possessive.

"Slowly," he said. "I can wait."

I pulled away then, finally finding my strength. I felt like I was sinking into a swamp. The more I struggled, the deeper I went.

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"I need time," I said firmly. "You can't force this."

He watched me for a long moment, then stepped back. His expression returned to calm, but his eyes still burned.

"I won't force you," he said. "But I won't let go either."

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The next day, I returned to my delivery work.

The routine helped calm my mind. Riding my bike, delivering food, earning money with my own hands – it calmed me.

After finishing all the deliveries, I returned to the restaurant.

As I stepped inside, I froze. Someone was sitting there who did not belong.

Eric Simpson.

This small restaurant felt too narrow for him. He wore a dark blue tailored suit that fit him perfectly. His handsome face was calm and cold. He looked like someone who should have been attending high-end banquets, not sitting on a worn wooden chair.

I didn't see Jazz. Mrs. Sinclair was at the counter.

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Then Eric noticed me. He stood up and walked toward me.

"I didn't expect to see you working here," he said.

I frowned. "How did you know?"

"I saw you yesterday," he replied. "You were riding a bike. The delivery bag said 'Jazz's Kitchen.' I got curious."

I looked at him in surprise. So, he followed me here? Why did he care so much?

"Bella," Mrs. Sinclair called, "there are three more orders.

Please deliver them."

"Okay," I answered.

I moved to the counter and picked up the boxes. Mrs. Sinclair leaned closer and whispered, "Is that your friend?"

I shook my head. "Just an acquaintance."

That was the truth. We weren't close enough to be friends.

As I prepared to leave, a strange thought crossed my mind. Even if he recognized the restaurant name, he did not need to come here. Was he waiting for me?

I pushed the thought away.

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“Are you heading out to deliver those?” Eric asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “That’s my job.”

“Did Kane allow you to do this kind of work?”

I paused, then looked at him calmly. “There’s nothing wrong with this job. I like earning my own money.”

I walked to my bike and secured the food. I was just about to climb on it when I heard a voice behind me.

“Wait,” he said suddenly, grabbing my arm.

I turned back, confused.

“Are you angry?” he asked. “I didn’t mean to look down on your work.”

I shook my head. “I’m not angry. If I got upset over things like that, I would have been angry long ago.”

He looked at me carefully. “I can help you find a better job if you want.”

“Mr. Simpson,” I said gently but firmly, “we’re not that close. I don’t need your help. I’m fine as I am.”

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+8 Bonus

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I glanced at his hand. “Please let go. I need to deliver these.”

He stared at me for a moment before releasing me.

“You’re really happy like this?” he asked. “A former doctor, delivering food?”

The word “doctor” pierced me. It hurt me deeply but I didn’t respond. I got on my bike.

Before I left, he said one more thing.

“If you can’t stay with Kane anymore,” he said, “you can come to me.”

My eyes widened in surprise. What did he mean by that? I had no idea what to say so, I just started the engine and zoomed off.

As I rode away, I heard his voice again.

“If you can’t stay with Kane anymore, you can come to me.”

I didn’t look back.

Even if I left Kane, I would never choose Eric. A man like him was gentle only on the surface. I had seen what happened to his ex-girlfriends once they were no longer useful.

8/9

Chapter 256

THIRD PERSON'S POV

Eric stood where Bella had left him, watching her figure disappear down the street.

Slowly, he opened his hand. Half-moon marks from his nails remained on his palm. His hand ached.

He frowned. He had actually cared whether she was upset.

This was absurd, he told himself. She was just a woman. She was just someone who looked like a memory from his past. Nothing more.

He returned to the counter to pay.

**66**

“Where is the cashier who was here earlier?” he asked casually.

“She’s... in the kitchen,” Mrs. Sinclair answered nervously.

Eric nodded and left. Before stepping out, he glanced once toward the kitchen.

After he was gone, Mrs. Sinclair walked into the kitchen.

“He’s gone,” she told Jazz.

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Jazz did not relax. Instead, she asked quietly, "Did he say anything?"

"He just asked where you were," Mrs. Sinclair said slowly. "I told him you were in the kitchen, so he glanced in that direction." She paused, studying Jazz carefully. "Who is he? Do you know him?"

Jazz's fingers tightened around the edge of the counter. For a brief second, she considered pretending she didn't know anything. But the unease in her chest told her it was pointless.

"That was Eric Simpson," Jazz said quietly.

Mrs. Sinclair's eyes widened slightly. "Eric Simpson?" she repeated. "The Eric Simpson?"

Jazz nodded, letting out a slow breath. "Yes. He's huge in entertainment circles. He's powerful, influential." Her voice dropped. "I ran into him a few times back when I was dating... you know who."

Mrs. Sinclair's expression changed immediately. She looked concerned now. "Did he recognize you?"

Jazz hesitated. Her lips pressed together as her thoughts raced. She had changed her hairstyle, her makeup, even the way she dressed. She looked nothing like the woman she used to be back then. But Eric's eyes earlier had been too intense. 2/9

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- Bonus

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"Probably," Jazz admitted. "I've changed my look since then, but that last question he asked..." She exhaled slowly. "I think he knows who I am."

Mrs. Sinclair's face fell. "That's not good."

Jazz shook her head. "No, it's not."

"What should we do?" Mrs. Sinclair asked. "Will he tell anyone?" She paused, then added carefully, "I think he knows Bella. Should we ask her to talk to him for us?"

Jazz bit her lower lip. Her mind replayed the moment Eric had appeared in the restaurant. At first, she truly thought it was an accident. Powerful people wandered into places like this all the time. But now... now it felt deliberate.

"He didn't come here by chance," Jazz said slowly. "He was here because of Bella."

Mrs. Sinclair stiffened. "Are you sure?"

Jazz nodded. "I am."

The difference between Eric's world and theirs felt overwhelming. He was a young leader in the industry, a man who could ruin or elevate lives with a single decision. She was just a woman working in a small restaurant, trying to live

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quietly and **stay** invisible.

The gap felt impossible to cross.

Just then, footsteps approached. Jazz turned and saw Bella returning, holding a delivery bag. Bella looked calm, but Jazz noticed the slight tension in her shoulders.

Jazz forced a smile. "Bella," she said, "do you know Eric?"

Bella stopped short. She looked surprised. "You know him too?"

Jazz laughed lightly, though it sounded strained. "Isn't he the one always in the news? The one surrounded by scandals and actresses?"

Bella nodded. "Yes. I've met him a few times."

Jazz's smile fell a bit "And you two are...?"

"There's nothing between us," Bella replied immediately.

Jazz still looked shocked, so Bella added calmly, "There really isn't."

There was a brief silence.

"If there's nothing else," Bella said, adjusting **her** grip on the 4/9

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+8 **Bonus**

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bag, "I'll go deliver my things."

"Alright," Jazz replied softly.

As Bella walked away, Jazz pressed her lips together. She knew she couldn't avoid this anymore.

It seemed she would have to talk to Eric herself.

JAYDEN'S POV

I watched Alpha Stonewood drink the herbal medicine, and I almost didn't believe my eyes.

Kane Stonewood hated medicine. He avoided it whenever possible, even when he was injured. And yet there he was, holding a bowl of dark, bitter liquid and drinking it without complaint.

I already knew why.

It was because of Bella.

Ever since she entered his life, my Alpha had been doing things that didn't make sense. He listened more. He rested more. He

even tried remedies he used to mock.

+8 **Bonus**

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When he finished the medicine, his face tightened instantly with disgust. He grabbed the glass of water beside him and drank it in one go.

"This tastes terrible," he muttered.

I said nothing. The fact that he drank it at all was shocking enough.

After a brief silence, Kane spoke again..

"Do you have any ideas on how to make a woman like me?" he asked.

I nearly froze. For a moment, I thought I heard wrong.

Was Alpha Kane Stonewood really asking me this?

Women usually threw themselves at him. He never had to try. He never had to ask.

I chose my words carefully. "Are you talking about Miss Jameson, Alpha?"

He glanced at me. His expression was neutral, but he didn't deny it.

That alone stunned me.

+ Bonus

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I swallowed. "Miss Jameson is... sensitive. Given her past, she notices things others don't. If you push too hard, she'll retreat."

Kane listened silently.

"She's more comfortable when things move slowly," I continued. "She reacts better when people are genuine or humble. If you try to impress her too much, she won't trust it."

He frowned. "So you want me to suck up to her?"

I shook my head immediately. "No. That's not what I meant at all. Just... be real. Don't perform. Don't intimidate."

He leaned back slightly. "Alright. Then how do I go about doing that?"

I hesitated. Since when did Alpha Stonewood ask how to win a woman's affection?

Before I could answer properly, my phone rang. I checked the caller ID and answered immediately.

The call was short, but when I ended it, my expression changed.

"Alpha Stonewood," I said, "someone is looking into Sophia Monroe's case from back then."

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His eyes darkened instantly. "Who's behind it?"

"We don't know yet," I replied. "But multiple people are gathering information. One witness in Melgrad is being followed."

"Peterson?" Kane asked.

"Yes," I confirmed. "But it isn't the private investigator Tara hired."

That made my stomach tighten. Kane had planted evidence carefully. Tara's investigation didn't worry him. This one did.

Kane tapped his finger on the desk slowly, deep in thought.

"It's Thomas," he said suddenly.

I blinked. "Thomas?"

"Check him," Kane said firmly. "He's the only one skilled enough to move without being noticed."

"Thomas from the Sulkin pack?" I asked, confused.

"Yes," he replied. "If he's involved, it's likely because of Tara."

He rubbed his temples. "I underestimated her."

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-8 Bonus

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I understood then. If Thomas found something real, Kane would have no choice but to confront him.

And that might change everything.

special offer: 800 bonus free to you

Chapter 257

TARA'S POV

I looked at Thomas and felt two emotions at the same time. I felt annoyed, and I felt amused. The man stood in front of me like he had all the time in the world.

He looked calm and confident, as if none of this was a problem for him.

“You really want to meet my parents?” I asked him. My tone was filled with disbelief and frustration.

Thomas lifted his eyebrows slightly as he replied casually, “Didn’t you say they wanted to meet me?”

I stared at him. He was wearing a well-fitted suit that made his tall figure stand out even more. His handsome features, calm eyes, and neat hair made him look unreal. He looked like a character pulled out of a manga. Anyone who saw him would never believe someone like him could be my boyfriend.

I hated that part of me still noticed how handsome he was.

I wanted to groan.

The past few days had been a complete disaster, and it all started with that stupid blind date. I had thought the

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part was sitting through that awkward meeting. I had thought everything would be fine once I escaped.

I was wrong.

When I got home that night, my mother had been waiting for me in the living room. Her face was dark, and her arms were crossed.

“Why didn’t you tell me you had a boyfriend?” she had demanded.

I was stunned. “What boyfriend?”

That was when I found out the matchmaker had called my parents. She complained that I had embarrassed her, embarrassed the man, and embarrassed everyone involved. According to her, I had ruined everything.

My parents immediately demanded to know who my boyfriend

was.

I panicked and denied it. I told them I didn't have a boyfriend. I said it was just a friend who happened to be nearby and helped me get out of an uncomfortable situation. I told them he knew I didn't want to go on the blind date, so he stepped in.

But my parents didn't believe me.

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"Which friend?" my father asked.

I named someone I was close to, planning to figure out the details later. Before I could fix anything, my phone rang.

It was Thomas.

Before I could even answer, my mother grabbed the phone from my hand.

"Hello?" she said brightly.

I froze.

She started chatting with him as if they had known each other for years. I stood there helplessly, watching her smile grow wider. Then she asked the question that changed everything.

"So, young man," my mother said, "what is your relationship with my daughter?"

I held my breath.

"Aunty," Thomas replied confidently, "I am her boyfriend."

That single sentence felt like a bomb exploding in my living room.

My parents panicked. My mother immediately called Thomas 3/8

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again and invited him over. I tried to grab my phone back, but every time I moved, my father shot me a sharp look that stopped me cold.

After the call ended, I sat through a two-hour lecture.

“You little rascal,” my mother scolded. “What’s so embarrassing about having a boyfriend? Even if he’s not handsome or has a terrible job, you should still tell us. Were you planning to hide it until you were pregnant?”

I was speechless.

I couldn’t tell them the truth. I couldn’t tell them Thomas and I didn’t even know what we were doing. I couldn’t tell them this was about revenge. That would drag up things I had buried long ago.

So I accepted my fate.

I chose a day and invited Thomas over, just like my parents ordered.

Now, standing beside him, I felt a little doubt in my heart. Thomas wasn’t just any man. He was the head of the Sulkin family. He controlled everything. Even though he was an illegitimate child, he stood at the top now.

Many mothers would fight to have a son-in-law like him. 4/8

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+8 Bonus

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“Why are you staring at me like that?” Thomas asked with a small smile. “Worried your parents won’t like me?”

I rolled my eyes. “That’s not what I’m worried about.”

What I didn’t say was that I was afraid my parents would like him too much. If this ended, they would be heartbroken. I would walk away just fine.

I sighed. “Let’s go.”

We walked into my residential area. I led him toward my building and pressed the elevator button. When the doors opened, some neighbors stepped out and immediately spotted

“Tara, you’re back!” one of them said happily. “This must be your boyfriend.”

I hesitated.

“Yes,” Thomas replied before I could speak. “I’m Tara’s boyfriend.”

The neighbor laughed. “Looks like I’ll be attending your wedding soon. Oh, Tara, your mother has been talking about meeting your boyfriend all day.”

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My face burned. So that explained everything. My mother had already told the whole neighborhood.

Inside the elevator, I glanced at Thomas. He was watching me with a knowing half-smile. My heart beat faster, and I hated that it did.

“Um,” I said after a moment, “my parents might be nervous. I’ve never had a boyfriend before. Just agree with whatever they say, okay? I’ll get you out later.”

He stopped and looked at me closely. He looked a bit shocked “You’ve never had a boyfriend?”

He leaned closer. His eyes were deep and dark.

My heart raced. I was weak to good looks, and his face was dangerous.

“I was busy with work,” I said awkwardly. “I didn’t have time.”

“Really?” he teased. “I hoped you’d say you still couldn’t forget about me.”

I almost choked.

Ding. The elevator reached our floor.

We walked toward my apartment. I unlocked the door, and the 6/8

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moment I stepped inside, my heart sank.

My father was wearing his formal suit. My mother was dressed perfectly. Her hair and makeup were all flawless. She had clearly been to the salon.

Everyone in the neighborhood must already know.

“Dad, Mom,” I said stiffly, “this is Thomas... my boyfriend.”

“Hello, Uncle and Auntie,” Thomas said politely.

“H-hello,” my parents replied at the same time.

My father asked him to sit. My mother pulled me aside.

“Is this really your boyfriend?” she whispered. “You didn’t hire him, did you?”

I sighed. “Sure. Think of him as an actor.”

She frowned. “Not funny. Go make tea.”

Rolling my eyes, I got up and did as was told. When I returned with the tray, they were chatting happily.

“Thomas,” my mother said, “you said you met Tara abroad?”

“Yes,” he replied calmly. “I searched for her for years. I’m glad 7/8

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I finally found her.”

He looked at me.

To my parents, it looked romantic. To me, it felt like a threat.

My father smiled. “But you only met for a few days. How did you fall for Tara so quickly?”

My heart stopped. That question was dangerous.

And I knew this was about to get much worse.

chapter 258

TARA'S POV

My father leaned back on the sofa and looked at Thomas. I

could tell he was curious and that made me even more scared.

When my father was curious, he would make sure he got to the bottom of whatever it is he wanted to know.

As my dad spoke, his tone was calm. He sounded interested.

"I'm really curious," my dad said. "Tara was only abroad for a few days. You're a handsome young man. You could easily find a girlfriend anywhere in the world. Yet you said you searched for her for three years. How did that happen so quickly?"

"Yeah" my mom said "How come you both formed such a strong bond in such a little time?"

I felt my scalp tighten.

My dad looked impressed. I knew that look. He was already starting to like Thomas, and that made me feel even more

nervous.

Thomas smiled politely and nodded.

"Tara left a strong impression on me," he said calmly. "She's very straightforward. I feel relaxed when I'm around." 09:24

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My heart jumped.

"There was one time when I was drunk," Thomas continued naturally, as if he was telling an innocent story.

My body tensed instantly. I knew where this was going.

The teacup in my hand tilted, and hot tea spilled onto the back of my hand.

“Ouch!” I cried softly.

The cup slipped from my fingers and landed on the table. The pain was hot and burning. My hand turned red in seconds.

Thomas stood up at once.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

His expression was filled with concern.

Before I could answer, he grabbed my wrist and pulled me up. He led me straight to the kitchen.

He turned on the tap and pushed my hand under cold water.

“Can’t you even hold a teacup properly?” he muttered.

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I lowered my voice and leaned closer to him.

“Please don’t mention that night at the hotel,” I said urgently. “My parents are conservative. If they find out, they’ll kill me.”

He glanced at me sideways. “Kill you? That sounds dramatic.”

I felt embarrassed immediately. “Okay... maybe that was too much,” I admitted.

I looked at him and pleaded, my voice softer. “Just promise you won’t say anything. Please.”

He pressed his lips together and stayed silent.

“If you keep quiet, I could...” I stopped mid-sentence.

I felt stupid.

What could I offer him? Dinner? He was rich. A gift? He had everything. I had nothing he would want.

“What can you do?” he asked, leaning closer.

His face was inches away from mine. My heart started racing for no reason I wanted to admit. Up close, he looked even more gorgeous. His skin was flawless. Unfairly flawless.

“Well... I’ll do anything you want,” I said quietly. 3/9

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I knew how weak that sounded.

“Fine,” he replied.

I blinked. “That’s it?”

He ignored my confusion and looked at my hand. His expression turned to one filled with concern “Does it still hurt?”

“Not as much,” I said. “The cold water helped.”

He turned off the tap and took out a handkerchief. He dried my hand slowly and carefully. His movements were so gentle that it shocked me.

“Do you have ointment?” he asked. “It’s swollen.”

“Yes. In my room.”

“Go get it.”

I went without thinking. Halfway there, I wondered why I was listening to him so easily.

When I returned, I froze.

Thomas was sitting with my parents, chatting calmly.

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+8 Bonus

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My mom was smiling. “So Tara stayed with you at the hotel when you were drunk? That’s our girl. She’s always helping people.”

I nearly choked.

Thomas nodded. “She took good care of me. If not, things could have gone badly. When people drink too much, there’s a risk of choking.”

Guilt twisted in my chest. They had no idea what really went down that night.

My parents nodded seriously.

“It was the right thing to do,” my dad said. “You should always help others.”

I wanted the ground to swallow me. Thomas raised his head, looking straight at me.

“Come here,” Thomas said, gesturing beside him.

I walked over and sat down next to him. For some reason, I felt like a well-trained pet.

He took the ointment from my hand and gently applied it on my skin. His fingers were warm. My skin tingled where he

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touched me.

My parents exchanged looks.

Then my mom smiled and asked, “Thomas, do you have other family? Are your parents retired?”

“My father passed away,” Thomas replied calmly. “My mother lives abroad.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that, dear. Any siblings?” my mom

continued.

"I have half-siblings," he said.

The room went quiet. My parents looked a bit skeptical. I could see the gears turning in their heads already.

I spoke quickly. "Mom, Dad, that's not his fault. He didn't choose any of that."

Thomas looked at me with a shocked expression. His eyes softened slightly.

My dad recovered first. "That's true. So, Thomas, what do you do?"

"I manage a company," Thomas replied.

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"You manage a company?" my dad echoed. "At 29? That's pretty young"

"Yes."

"Have I heard of it?"

"Sulkin Group."

My dad smiled awkwardly. "I... don't think so. Is it new?"

Thomas just smiled. My parents were old school. They probably didn't know about the Sulkin pack or their industry. If they did, their mouths would have been on the floor.

Dinner followed.

Thomas talked easily. He placed food on my plate before I even asked.

"You don't like onions," he said quietly.

"You prefer the softer pieces," he added, moving food aside.

I stared at him in disbelief. How did he know all this? No one ever noticed these things.

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After dinner, my parents prepared more questions to ask him. I didn't want to give them that chance so I changed the subject entirely.

"We should go for a walk," I said quickly, pulling Thomas up.

"But-" my mom started.

"Mom" I said, giving her a warning look.

Thomas smiled and shook their hands "It was lovely to meet you, Mr and Mrs Banks. Thank you for having me"

My mom swooned. She looked charmed and taken by him already.

She smiled "It was lovely to meet you, dear. Come again soon!"

Thomas smiled at her "Yes ma'am. Definitely"

Definitely. That word made me swallow hard.

Thomas and I left the apartment, making our way to the elevator.

In the elevator, I sighed. "Thank you. If we stayed longer, they would have asked about your ancestors."

He looked at me. "You didn't have to defend me earlier." 8/9

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I frowned. "What do you mean?"

He asked calmly, "If you want your parents to be unimpressed with me... why did you protect me?"

chapter 259

TARA'S POV

I was caught off guard by his question. I had spoken without thinking earlier, driven by impulse. Now his eyes stayed on me and I suddenly felt uneasy.

“So,” he asked slowly, “you don’t want your parents to dislike me?”

The look in his eyes made my throat close up I didn’t like how easily he could make me feel flustered.

“That’s not what I meant,” I replied. “I just think what happened with the older generation has nothing to do with you. You shouldn’t be judged for that. Don’t read too much

into it.”

I turned my head away because my face felt warm. I didn’t want him to see it.

“Is that all?” he asked.

There was something meaningful in his tone. I felt my cheeks grow hotter.

Before I could answer, the elevator dinged and reached the first floor. I felt relieved. I stepped out quickly and headed

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toward his car, eager to end the night.

“That’s all for today,” I said fast. “Bye–bye.”

I turned to leave, but suddenly his arm wrapped around my waist. I was pulled back hard.

“Ah!” I exclaimed as my nose hit his chest. “Ouch!”

I rubbed my nose, already sore from too many accidents like this. Even steel wouldn’t survive that kind of impact.

Thomas leaned down. His lips hovered near my ear. I shivered at the feeling of his breath on my body.

“Didn’t you say that if I kept quiet about the hotel, you’d agree to one of my requests?” he whispered.

His breath brushed my ear. He was warm and close. My body reacted before my mind could. Heat spread through me, and my heart beat wildly.

“What... what kind of request?” I asked, licking my dry lips.

“I want you to kiss me,” he said calmly, “and say that I’m the person you like the most.”

I froze. I blinked repeatedly in disbelief. What?

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“Here?” I asked, stunned.

“Yes,” he replied. “Right here.”

I looked around. It wasn’t late and people were still passing by. Cars moved in and out of the parking lot. Anyone could see us. I wasn’t a big fan of PDA, especially in this kind of neighborhood where people liked to talk.

For all I knew, my parents could still be watching us through the window. I definitely wouldn’t want my parents to see us make out. That would be weird as hell.

“This place is too open,” I said. “What if someone sees us?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Why? Are you embarrassed to be seen with me?”

“That’s not it,” I said quickly. “People talk. What if they misunderstand?”

“So what?” he said. “We’re a couple now. Let them talk.”

I didn’t say the truth – that this wouldn’t last, that I was a bit scared that he was just using me for revenge.

I looked at him, really looked at him.

The moonlight softened his face. His skin looked pale and 3/8

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8 Bonus

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smooth. His eyes were dark and deep. I stared into his eyes, unable to control myself. He was as beautiful in a way that felt dangerous. When I had first met him, I thought he looked unreal. Now he felt even harder to resist.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and stood on my tiptoes.

I realized something then – I didn't mind kissing him. In fact, I looked forward to it.

I leaned in and kissed him.

Our lips met. The kiss was slow at first, then it got deeper. My heart pounded deep in my chest. His hand rested firmly at my waist. The kiss turned heated. It was full of tension and desire. I forgot where we were. I forgot everything else.

For now, I chose to cherish this moment.

BELLA'S POV

After my shift ended, I walked up to Jazz and hesitated for a moment.

"Jazz," I said, "may I take tomorrow afternoon off? I want to visit my mother's grave."

Jazz looked surprised. "Your mother?"

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"Yes," I replied. "Tomorrow is the full moon."

She nodded. "Of course. Take the afternoon. Ask the kitchen to prepare dishes for offerings."

"Thank you," I said. "But I'll prepare them myself."

After leaving the restaurant, I didn't go home right away.

I went to the supermarket and bought fish, meat, and

vegetables. Then I rode my electric bike to the small shop that sold prayer items.

"Ma'am," I said to the elderly owner, "I need three sets of incense. Same as always."

"Bella?" she smiled. "Going to visit the grave tomorrow?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"Making your mother's favorite food again," she said kindly. "I haven't seen you in years."

"I've been busy," I replied softly.

"Your mother must be proud," she said.

Proud?

I felt an ache in my chest. I couldn't even save her photo 5/8

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-8 Bonus

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album. All I could do now was clean her grave. I didn't feel so proud of myself.

When I was done, I returned to the Stonewood Residence. As I entered the kitchen, a cold voice stopped me.

"Why are you late?" a voice spoke.

66

"Ah!" I gasped.

Suddenly, the lights turned on. Kane sat on the sofa.

"Why were you sitting in the dark?" I asked in shock.

"I was waiting for you," he said, standing. "Now answer me.

I swallowed. "I bought ingredients and incense. I'm visiting my mother's grave tomorrow."

He looked at the incense.

"Full moon," he said quietly. "A good day."

"I won't go with you," he added.

I hadn't expected him to offer, yet his words still surprised me. I wondered why he said that. After putting everything away, I turned and saw him leaning against the door, watching me.

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"You didn't say goodnight," he said.

The way he looked at me made my heart beat faster. My body felt aware of him.

"Goodnight," I replied quickly.

He smiled. "That sounded rushed."

Then he leaned closer. "Someone told me that if I want you to like me, I should try to please you."

My eyes widened in surprise. What? He wanted me to like him? By all means?.

"What do you think?" he asked. "If I pleased you, would you like me?"

My heart raced. He leaned in then touched my lips with his fingers gently. Slowly, his fingertips traced my lips. I fought the urge to close my eyes and lean into his touch.

"Tell me," he whispered. "How should I please you?"

Heat filled the air between us. His closeness made it hard to

breathe.

I didn't know how much of this was real.

7/8

chapter 260

KANE'S POV

It was the day of the full moon,

I went to the cemetery first.

The sky was pale, and the air felt heavy, I stood in front of my mother's grave for a long time. I didn't rush, I never did on this day, I cleaned the area carefully and placed the offerings in order. The stone felt cold when I touched it,

I used to come here with my grandfather.

Now, I came alone

Afterward, I went straight to the hospital to see my grandfather.

Allen lay on the hospital bed, thinner than before. His cheeks were sunken, and his breathing was shallow. Seeing him like this always stirred complicated feelings in me.

He looked thinner and weaker than I remembered. Time had taken its toll on him. The man who once ruled everything now looked fragile.

"You went to see your mother?" he asked.

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"Yes," I replied quietly.

We used to go together. Now, I went alone before coming here. He was too weak to even get up.

Allen's eyes darkened. "What would your mother say if she knew you were letting a woman cloud your judgment?" His voice got harsh. "She would knock some sense into you."

I sighed "Grandpa, what are you trying to say?"

He stared at me hard. I knew what he was thinking as he looked into my eyes. My eyes resembled my mother's. That always unsettled him. My father had destroyed their relationship. My mother had left home and died too young.

"Did you forget what happened to your mother?" he growled.

"No," I said firmly. "I didn't forget. And I told you before. I won't repeat her mistakes."

"Then dump Bella and stay away from her," he snapped.

"I'm afraid that won't happen"

Allen looked stunned. "You-"

"I won't make my mother's mistakes," I continued calmly.

2/7

09:26

+8 Bonus

< chapter 260

"Everything will stay under control. Bella will grow used to **my** presence. She won't want to leave."

I smiled slightly, but my eyes were cold. "So don't interfere. If you do, I'll limit your influence."

Allen's face turned red. He coughed, looking angry. "Are you threatening me?"

"No," I replied evenly. "I'm reminding you."

I looked him straight in the eye. "If anything happens to her, we'll be on opposite sides."

He stared at me for a long moment. He finally realized I meant every word.

"What's so special about her?" he asked bitterly.

He had already judged Bella. He thought she was ordinary. After all, she had no wolf. To him, she wasn't suitable for me.

"She's the first woman I ever called 'Sister,'" I said quietly.

She once told me we could rely on each other. That feeling of home stayed with me.

Allen looked at me like I was joking.

3/7

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#B

+8 Bonus

< chapter 260

"You wouldn't understand," I added.

"You'll regret this one day!" he shouted.

"Then live long enough to see it," I replied calmly.

#### BELLA'S POV

That afternoon, I left the restaurant carrying the food I had prepared early in the morning. I also brought the incense I bought the night before.

I was going to my mother's grave.

When my mother died, my father didn't buy a cemetery plot. He buried her in a village burial ground because it was cheap. A few cigarettes were enough to convince the villagers.

I wanted to move her grave to a proper cemetery.

The mountain was far. The path was rough. The tombstone had cracked over the years. Repairing it cost too much.

Then I went to prison.

After I was released, I didn't have money. The plan stayed unfinished.

When I reached the foot of the hill, a registration tent stood 4/7

09:26

8 Bonus

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there. Villagers came and went, carrying offerings.

I gave my mother's grave number.

"That grave was moved," the man said immediately.

I froze.

"Moved?" I repeated.

"Yes," he replied. "A man named Alex handled it. He said he was the husband."

My chest tightened.

“Where did he move it?” I asked urgently.

“We only process removals,” he said. “Not new locations.”

I bit my lip. “Please,” I said. “Let me check. I’ll register again if it’s gone.”

He hesitated, then waved me through. I ran up the mountain. When I reached the site, my heart dropped. The grave was gone. The tombstone was gone.

Only an empty pit remained.

My hands shook with fear and panic. I pulled out my phone 5/7

09:26

+8 Bonus

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and called my father. After several rings, he answered.

“What is it?” Alex answered coldly.

“Did you move Mom’s grave?” I asked.

“So what if I did?” he snapped. “The unfilial daughter remembers now?”

“Where is she?” I asked.

“You cut ties with this family,” he sneered. “Why should I tell you?”

I took a deep breath. I tried to stay calm even though my heart was racing inside.

“What do you want?”

“You’re begging me now? Pathetic. Fifty million,” he said. “Otherwise forget it.”

“Fifty million?” I shrieked “Where do you want me to get that kind of money?”

He hung up. I called again. He declined.

My chest hurt. It felt like I couldn’t breathe. My vision had gotten blurry. Even in this large space, it felt as if the walls 6/7

09:26

Bonus

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were closing in on me.

I had to do something....fast.

I ran down the mountain and went straight to the Jameson house. When I got there, I rang the bell again and again. My whole body shook with panic.

“Come on. Come on” I muttered.

I kept ringing the door bell.

No one answered.

I stood there, helpless.