

Through Rising Fog We Walk Paths Unknown Yet Comforting

chapter 261

BELLA'S POV

+8 Bonus

I kept knocking on the door, even when my knuckles started to hurt. Maybe they were just slow to answer. Maybe someone was inside.

I rang the bell again and again, my heart beating faster each time. Please be home. Just this once, be home.

The house remained silent. I didn't hear any voices or footsteps. There was no sound at all.

A bad feeling settled deep in my chest.

I stepped back slowly, already knowing the answer. They weren't here.

Just

then, the neighbor from the next house came out and greeted me. She smiled politely, but her eyes showed curiosity. She probably wondered why I looked so desperate.

"You're here to see your father?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied quietly. My voice sounded tight even to my own ears. "Is anyone home?"

Please say yes.

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The neighbor shook her head. "They left early this morning. Your father and stepmother went on vacation. They said they'd be gone for a while."

My fingers tightened around my bag. Vacation? Today? Of all days?

“Do you know when they’ll be back?” I asked. Even a date would help. Anything.

She sighed. “I don’t. They didn’t say.”

I swallowed and forced myself to ask the next question. “What about Kathy?”

The neighbor laughed lightly. “Oh, Kathy? She bought a bigger house. She rarely comes back now.”

My mind went blank for a second. So even she’s gone. I had no idea that Kathy had bought a bigger house.

Everything clicked together too easily. The realization hit me. hard. They planned this. Every single part of it.

They knew I would come today. They knew I would go to my mother’s grave. They knew exactly how to trap me.

I thanked the neighbor and walked away slowly. I couldn’t let

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her see how shaken I was.

As I walked, my father’s words echoed in my head.

Fifty million.

The number made my head spin. I couldn’t even imagine that amount of money. Even if I worked for the rest of my life, I wouldn’t have it.

Where did he expect me to get that kind of money? There was no way out.

I took out my phone and called Kathy. She had to answer.

After several rings, she finally picked up.

“Where are you?” I asked immediately. “I need to meet you.”

"I've been busy lately," Kathy replied lazily.

Busy pretending to be rich and important, as always.

"I just want to ask one thing," I said, forcing my voice to stay calm. "Where did Dad move my mother's grave?"

There was a short pause. Even though I couldn't see her, I

could tell that she was enjoying this. I imagined her smirking **at** the other end of the line, twirling her hair.

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"I don't know," Kathy said lightly. Her tone carried mockery. "Why would I know that?"

My fingers trembled.

"Then where are they vacationing? You should know that."

You're their precious daughter. Of course you know.

"Oh," she said slowly, "that's too bad. I don't know that either. But don't worry. I'll tell them you were looking for them when they get back."

Before I could respond, a man's voice sounded in the background.

"That lipstick color doesn't suit you."

My heart stopped. That voice...

It was Eric.

My grip tightened on the phone.

Kathy laughed softly. "Really? I thought you liked it. Fine, I'll change it."

"Alright," Kathy said casually, returning to the call. "I have to

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go now.”

The line went dead.

I stared at my phone for a long time. I thought about Eric and Kathy together. Just days ago, he was standing in front of me. Just days ago, he spoke as if I mattered.

Now he was with Kathy, discussing lipstick colors.

For a man like Eric, emotions were cheap. He could like many women at once while making each of them feel special.

When he lost interest, he could be cruel. I had seen it happen before. His last girlfriend had once been famous. Then she disappeared completely.

Oh well. It was none of my business anyway.

I put my phone away slowly. I shouldn't feel hurt. After all, this wasn't my fault but my heart still sank.

I had no money. No clues. No way to find my mother's grave.

Even if I found my father later, would he tell me? Or would he demand something even worse?

I thought my life had already hit rock bottom.

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I realized then that I was wrong. The worst hadn't come yet.

KATHY'S POV

Eric watched as I put my phone away.

“Who was that?” he asked casually.

“Someone looking for my parents,” I replied calmly. “They're on vacation, so they contacted me instead.”

I didn't want to tell him it was Bella. He was already asking too many questions about her as it was. If he knew it was her, he might just ask me even more questions.

I moved closer to him. I needed his attention.

I batted my eyelashes sweetly at him "Eric, what lipstick color do you like? I'll wear only the color you prefer."

He frowned, staring at my lips. Why was he looking at me like that?

"Wipe it off," he said.

I froze. What did he just say?

"What?" I asked.

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"I said wipe off your lipstick," he repeated coldly.

There was no warmth in his tone. He sounded impatient.

My heart sank. I dressed up for him. I wanted to look beautiful....all for him.

"But we're almost there," I protested.

"Now," he said sharply.

I knew better than to argue. I couldn't afford to upset him.

I took out a tissue and wiped my lipstick away. My hands were shaking as I did it. My chest hurt.

Eric didn't even look at me.

Instead, he stared at the silver bracelet. His fingers traced it gently. He always looked at this cheap bracelet like it was the most precious thing in the world. He had never looked at me like that – like I mattered

Jealousy burned inside me.

I remembered the drawing. The girl with silver bangles. He was searching for someone.

The rumors were true. 7/9

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And Bella...

She looked too much like the girl. The thought of it alone terrified me.

If Bella really was that girl, everything I had would collapse. I couldn't let that happen.

I moved closer to Eric, showed him my makeup and pressed myself against him. I had to keep him.

I tried to kiss him but he stepped back.

"Why don't you ever kiss me?" I asked.

He checked his watch. "We're late."

He pushed me aside gently and walked away.

I stood there, frozen. I don't get it. We've been dating for a while now. He buys me everything but he won't touch me.

It made no sense.

I clenched my fists. I was determined to get married to Eric. I wanted to be the woman he chose in the end.

I won't lose. I'll try harder.

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I had to win him.

chapter 262

KANE'S POV

When I returned to the Stonewood Residence, the maids informed me that Bella was home. I nodded and went straight upstairs.

I stopped in front of her door and pushed it open.

The room was completely dark.

I frowned. I was a bit confused. Bella hated the dark. She always left the lights on. Even when she tried to change that habit, she never lasted long. She said the dark always reminded her of prison.

Back when we lived in the cabin, she forced herself to sleep with the lights off. She said she didn't want to waste electricity. But after a few nights, she went back to sleeping with the lights

1. on.

So the darkness immediately felt wrong.

Was she even here?

I was about to turn around when I heard it – the sound of muffled crying.

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My body went stiff. She's here.

I reached for the wall and turned on the light.

The room flooded with brightness.

Bella was crouched in the corner with her back pressed against the wall. Her knees were pulled to her chest and her face was buried between them. Her shoulders shook as she tried to hold

in her sobs.

My chest closed up at the sight of her. She looked so

broken....so sad.

She's crying.

I rarely saw her cry. And every time I did, it made me feel helpless.

I walked over quickly and crouched in front of her.

"What's wrong?" I asked quietly. My voice stayed calm, but my heart was not. "What happened?"

She flinched at my voice. Slowly, she lifted her head.

Her eyes were red and swollen. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Her lips trembled as she tried to breathe properly.

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The sight hit me harder than I expected.

She looks broken.

"Tell me," I said again, softer this time. "What happened?"

Bella sniffled, her voice shaking. "I..... I can't find my mother."

Her words came out unevenly. "I can't find where she is anymore."

She started crying harder.

My brows furrowed in confusion. What does she mean she can't find her? Her mother passed away years ago.

She tried to calm herself but failed.

"My father... he moved her grave," she said through sobs. "I went today. It was gone."

Her breathing turned ragged.

"I don't know where he moved her. I don't know anything." She sobbed harder. She choked on air as she spoke "I called everyone. My father. My stepmother. Kathy. No one told me anything ."

As soon as she said that, anger coursed through my veins. I had 3/10

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the urge to kill everyone who had ever hurt her.

Her hands clenched into fists. "I don't know what to do anymore."

I finally understood. They took even that away from her.

I wiped the tears from her face gently.

"What did your father say?" I asked.

She hesitated, then looked straight at me.

"He wants fifty million," she said hoarsely. "If I want to know where my mother is."

Her eyes were filled with more tears as they locked onto mine.

She thinks this is why they did it. She thinks I'm the reason. I most likely am.

Then she grabbed my hand suddenly.

"Give me fifty million," she said urgently. "If you do, I'll stay with you. You can keep me. I'll do whatever you want."

Her grip tightened on mine as more tears rolled down her eyes.

"If you give me the money, I can find her." she cried "Please, 4/10

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I'm begging you"

I looked at her in shock.

She's offering herself. Not because she wants to but because she's desperate. I didn't like that.

“Do you know what you’re asking?” I asked slowly.

“Yes,” she replied, her voice breaking. But her eyes said otherwise – She had no choice.

I laughed. “But I don’t want to.”

Her body stiffened instantly. The light in her eyes disappeared. She laughed softly at herself, bitterly. Suddenly, she let go of my hand. Her shoulders slumped.

I stood up.

“You should rest,” I said calmly. “I’ll have food brought to you. You need to eat something before you sleep.”

After saying those words, I left.

If I stayed, I wouldn’t be able to stay calm.

I went straight to the study and called Jayden.

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“Find out where Bella went today,” I ordered “I want to know everything.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

An hour later, he called back.

“They moved her mother’s grave,” he reported.

My wolf growled deep inside me.

“Details.” I said.

“Her father moved it a week ago. When she arrived today, it was already gone. She went up the hill anyway. After that, she left quickly.”

He continued. “She went to her family home. No one was there. She spoke to neighbors. She made thirty–eight calls to her family but none answered.”

Thirty–eight. My jaw tightened.

They wanted to break her.

“Find out where her mother is buried,” I ordered.

“Yes Alpha.”

Just then, there was a knock.

“Sir,” the servant said nervously. “Miss Bella refused to eat. She won’t respond.”

I stood and went back to her room. When I got there, the lights were still on. The food sat untouched. Bella hadn’t moved.

I picked up the plate and placed it in front of her.

“Eat,” I said. “If you want to know where your mother is, eat first.”

Her head snapped up immediately. Her eyes were filled with hope.

“You know?” she asked desperately.

“Yes.” I pushed the food to her “Eat.”

She grabbed the food and ate quickly, too quickly. She took large gulps of the food. I was so scared she would choke.

“Slow down,” I said. “I’ll take you even if she’s buried at the ends of the earth.”

She slowed down when I said those words. When she finished, I wiped her mouth gently.

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“I’m done,” she whispered. “Please... tell me.”

I touched her cheek.

“Go wash your face,” I said. “She wouldn’t want to see you like this.”

She hesitated.

“You don’t trust me?” I asked lightly.

She looked at me, then nodded and went to the bathroom. When she returned, I was waiting.

“Your father asked for fifty million?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“You didn’t need to ask me for money,” I said calmly. “You could have asked me for help.”

Her eyes widened. She hadn’t thought of that. I could tell.

“Can you take me there now?” she asked.

“There’s no rush,” I replied. “You need rest.”

Before she could say another word, Jayden called.

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“It’s ready.” He said.

“Alright” I hung up.

“Come with me,” I said.

She followed me without hesitation. I led her downstairs then outside where a car was waiting. We got in and the driver took off with Jayden in the car as well.

In the car, she noticed we weren’t heading to a cemetery. When we finally stopped, she looked confused.

“Come on,” I said, taking her hand.

Jayden waited inside with others.

“It’s here,” he said.

We got down together and I led her inside a building. The room we entered was bare.

A table stood in the center and on it was a single box.

It was an urn.

Bella froze.

chapter 263

BELLA'S POV

My eyes widened as I stepped closer to the table. I couldn't believe what I was seeing right in front of me.

There was an urn on the table. I knew what an urn was for. Was....was my mother in there? The thought of it made my heart beat even faster.

My hands shook as I reached out. Please... please let this be real.

As soon as I touched the urn, it felt cold under my fingers. I grabbed it, looking at it. Right now, this urn was the most precious thing to me.

The metal felt heavy in my hands as I looked at it.

I leaned closer, breathing heavily. My mother's name was engraved on it. The date of her death was right beneath it.

My vision blurred with tears. This... this is really her. My heart shook violently.

This was my mother's cinerary casket. For a moment, I couldn't breathe.

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I had always assumed that if my father moved my mother's grave, he would at least give her a proper burial. Even he wouldn't be that cruel... right?

But I was wrong. He hadn't bought a burial plot. He hadn't arranged anything. He had simply taken her ashes and locked them away.

How could he be so mean? This was a woman he was married to for years, a woman he claimed to love. I might not be able to remember much about my mom but I remember how dearly she loved my dad.

Why would he dishonor her memory like this?

Jayden's calm voice confirmed everything I feared.

“Miss Jameson’s father paid three months’ rent for this room after taking the urn,” he said quietly. “He came once on the first day and never returned.”

I looked at him “What?”

He looked at me with a sympathetic expression “There were no cemetery records. No burial arrangements.”

My chest tightened.

So that’s it.

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I stared at the urn, unable to look away.

He never planned to bury her. He just wanted leverage.

Once he got what he wanted, he would probably return the **urn** and save himself the cost of a burial plot. The realization felt both cruel and ridiculous.

I wondered how my mother would feel. The man she loved. The man she trusted....reduced her to a bargaining chip.

My nose burned with sadness and anger. More tears threatened to fall but none came. I’ve cried enough today.

I slowly lifted my head and looked at Kane. I felt grateful for this. I only knew about this because of him.

“Thank you,” I said softly. My voice was steady, even though my heart wasn’t.

Without him, I would never have found her.

“If you really want to thank me,” Kane replied calmly, “you can do it later.”

My heart skipped. Later? What did he mean by that?

He turned to Jayden. “Is everything ready?”

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“Yes,” Jayden answered.

Kane turned back to me. “Let’s give your mother a proper burial.”

I froze in shock. My mind went blank. A... proper burial? He wanted to help me bury her properly? But how?

“Let’s go,” he added gently. “Everything is ready.”

Something inside me loosened. His voice wasn’t loud. It wasn’t dramatic. But it made me feel safe. I felt like I could finally breathe. I didn’t know what he had planned but I knew I trusted him.

I nodded and followed him.

The drive was quiet. As the car moved, I held the urn tightly in my arms. I could feel more tears prick the back of my eyes. I won’t let go.

When the car stopped, I looked up. My breath caught in my throat when I realized where we were. We were at one of the most prestigious burial grounds in the city.

I recognized it instantly. Even rich families struggle to get plots

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here.

Kane opened the door for me. I got down, taking a look around.

“Come on” Kane said.

He took my hand then guided me through the cemetery. Cemetery workers waited ahead.

When Kane finally stopped walking, I saw it. – The headstone.

My eyes filled up with more tears. My mother’s name was already carved into it and so was the date.

And in the corner...My name was there too. My vision blurred

again.

He... did all of this...for me?

"Your mother will rest here," Kane said quietly. "If you'd like another spot, we can change it."

I shook my head immediately. "No. This is perfect."

The space was peaceful. Unlike the crowded rows nearby, this place felt open. Trees surrounded it. Stone benches stood nearby.

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It felt dignified. She deserves this.

"You can place her here," Kane said.

I knelt down carefully. My hands shook as I placed the urn inside.

"Mom... I'm sorry it took this long" I cried inside me "I miss you. I love you so much. Rest well"

When I was done, the workers sealed it gently. After that, they filled up paper work. When they handed me the contract, my heart sank.

Fifty years. The price made my head spin.

I could never afford this.

"Alpha Stonewood has covered everything," the staff said politely. "You just need to sign here."

My eyes went wide with shock. This was another debt. But pride meant nothing right now.

I signed.

When I was done, I turned to Kane.

"I won't keep waiting anymore," I whispered. "Please... bless me"

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1. me. I need to uncover the truth about the poisoning. I need to clear my ”

His eyes darkened. His hand trembled slightly as he held the incense.

I placed the incense in front of my mother’s grave.

Then Kane stepped forward. He bowed. Not once but three times. I was surprised at his actions.

Jayden and the bodyguards stiffened in shock.

This man... the most powerful Alpha... bowing.

Even I was stunned. I looked at him in disbelief.

“You...” I murmured.

“She’s your mother,” Kane said quietly. “It’s only right.”

He knelt and placed incense beside mine. He did it so carefully and gently. I could feel his respect for her in his movements. In that moment, my chest felt unbearably full.

This man...

If it weren’t for my mother... If it weren’t for me... He wouldn’t be here. And I wouldn’t have found someone who cared this

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deeply.

My heart trembled. And for the first time that night—

I felt at peace.

chapter 264

BELLA’S POV

I looked at Kane without meaning to.

It happened slowly, quietly, like my eyes had betrayed me before my mind could stop them.

His thick eyelashes outlined shadows beneath his eyes, and the moonlight caught in them, making his eyes look softer than it ever had during the day. His eyes were clear and strangely calm. His jaw was clean and defined, strong in a way that spoke of control.

From where I stood, I could see his profile perfectly.

Why am I staring like this? I asked myself.

I should have looked away. I knew that. I had learned long ago to be careful with men who looked like this – men who were powerful but my eyes refused to move. Even his ears looked better than most men's, and the thought startled me.

This is ridiculous, I thought. Get yourself together.

He was gorgeous, too gorgeous. He was too dangerous to be admired this freely.

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When he turned to face me, my breath caught in my chest. It felt as if something had struck my heart without warning.

In the moonlight, his eyes sparkled. They were focused entirely on me. The world seemed to narrow to just him until nothing else existed. In that moment, there was no cemetery, no past. No fear. It was just the two of us standing there.

I watched him move closer, step by step, until his presence filled my space. His face came nearer, and I could see every detail. He looked like something carefully crafted, like a masterpiece.

The attraction I felt to him felt like a weight on my chest until it became hard to breathe.

"What happened?" Kane asked quietly.

His voice pulled me back to reality.

I blinked, suddenly aware of how close we were. My heart was beating too fast, and I didn't know why.

"No... nothing," I said quickly.

Why am I acting like this? I scolded myself. You've faced worse than this.

"If there's nothing else, we can go back now," he said calmly. 2/8

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"You can always come here whenever you want to see your mother. Even if your father finds out she's buried here, he won't be able to move her ashes anywhere else."

I felt something loosen inside my chest at those words.

She's safe now, I thought. She won't be disturbed again.

As he spoke, Kane extended his hand toward me.

I stared at it. His hand was large and open. It wasn't forceful. It wasn't demanding. He wasn't rushing me.

Slowly, I placed my hand in his.

"Thanks," I said softly.

It was the second time I'd thanked him that night. The first was when he helped me find my mother's urn.

You helped her rest, Kane. You gave her peace. For that, I'll forever be grateful.

"If you really want to thank me," Kane said. His tone was lighter now "you could show a little more affection."

I froze. My cheeks burned instantly.

Did he really just say that?

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I didn't know how to respond, so I lowered my head. I felt embarrassed and caught off guard. I followed him quietly out of the cemetery. We got inside the car.

As the car moved, it was silent.

I turned my face toward the window and watched the cemetery disappear behind us.

I was glad my mother was laid to rest. This is where she belongs. She won't be moved again. The thought made me smile.

It was all because of Kane.

This felt like another debt to him. I keep telling myself to stay away but I keep owing him more.

He wanted me to like him. I could feel it in the way he looked at me. But I wondered how deep his feelings could really go

The thought unsettled me.

Three years in prison had carved scars into me that didn't fade easily. Fear, control, helplessness – they still lived inside my body. I didn't know if I could ever truly move past that. I didn't know if I could ever fall for him.

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Still, my eyes moved to Kane without permission. I found myself staring at him again.

"What's the matter?" he asked, catching me. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

He turned his head toward me, and once again, his eyes held me captive.

"No... nothing," I stammered.

My heart skipped painfully. Stop looking, I told myself.

I tried to turn away, but he noticed.

"You sure you're okay?" he asked.

He leaned closer. Gently, Kane lifted his hand and pinched my chin between his fingers, guiding my face up to meet his eyes.

"You have mixed emotions in your eyes," he said quietly. "Why is that?"

My breath grew shallow.

Because I don't trust myself around you. Because I want something I'm afraid of.

I didn't answer. My face felt hot under his gaze. 5/8

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“Why won’t you look at me?” he said. His voice was firmer now. “I want you to look at me.”

He moved closer. His presence was overwhelming but in the best way possible.

His voice felt like a command I didn’t realize I was obeying until my eyes lifted to meet his.

He was looking at me tenderly, and there was longing there.

His hair was combed back, his forehead was exposed, and suddenly he overlapped with the Kane I remembered – the one who used to look at me this way before everything changed.

“So,” he murmured near my ear, “do you like me?”

Do I?

I opened my mouth to deny it, but the words wouldn’t come.

If he was the Kane from before, maybe I would. But he wasn’t just him anymore.

He was Alpha Stonewood.

“You like me,” he said with certainty.

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A smile spread across his face, reaching his eyes. All I could think was how beautiful that smile was.

Back at Stonewood Residence, I followed him into the living

My nerves were tight. My thoughts were all over the

room.

place.

“You helped me so much today,” I said suddenly. “How... how do you expect me to repay you?”

He paused and turned.

“How are you going to repay me?” he asked. “Stay with me forever or sleep with me?”

My breath hitched. Before I could answer, his fingers pressed gently against my lips.

“When you asked for fifty million dollars,” he said calmly, “I already told you I didn’t want it.”

I stared at him, confused.

“I may have you,” he continued, “but that’s not enough.”

He leaned closer. “I want you to like me. Not a little. A lot. I want you to like me so much that you can’t bear losing me, 7/8

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Sis.”

My heart raced as he said those words. He brushed his fingers over my cheek with slow movements.

“I could force promises,” he said. “Or take what I want. But I won’t.”

I studied his face as he spoke. I stared deeply into his beautiful eyes..

Maybe... maybe I do like him, I admitted to myself. Maybe I liked him when he was Jay.

“Do you really want me to like you?” I whispered.

“Yes,” he answered without hesitation.

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chapter 265

BELLA’S POV

I finally gathered my courage and looked straight at Kane.

My chest felt tight, and my palms were damp, but I forced myself to speak anyway.

“What kind of feelings do you even have for me?” I asked. My voice shook a bit, but I didn’t stop. “You’ve never dated women like me. So what is it? You think I’m just a toy? Someone you can use to pass time?”

The words had been stuck in my chest for too long. Once they were out, my heart began to pound hard, like it was trying to

escape.

Say it now, I told myself. If you don’t, you’ll regret it.

Kane’s expression changed instantly.

The warmth in his eyes vanished. His eyes went dark. His jaw tightened, and a cold sneer tugged at the corner of his lips.

“If I saw you as a toy,” he said slowly,, “I wouldn’t have done any of this.”

Before I could react, his hand slid to the back of my h. His31

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fingers pressed firmly into my hair. His touch wasn’t rough, but possessive. He pulled me closer until I could feel the heat of his body.

“I haven’t had many people to love in my life,” he continued. His voice dropped even lower. “Except my father.”

His eyes locked onto mine.

“And now,” he said, “you’re the only one left.”

My breath caught painfully in my throat. What is he saying...?

He leaned closer, his forehead almost touching mine.

“Tell me,” he murmured, “how do you think I should feel about you?”

My heart was beating so fast it scared me.

Without thinking, I raised my hands and placed them on his cheeks. I just had the urge to touch him, to feel him.

I need to know he’s here. I need to know this isn’t something I imagined.

The moment I touched him, his body stiffened. His eyes widened slightly, as if he hadn’t expected it. There was surprise there, mixed with longing.

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"I like you," I said softly.

The words fell into the space between us. I couldn't hide it anymore. It was the first time I had said it out loud since learning who he truly was.

The air around us felt charged and heavy.

Kane leaned closer. His hand slid down to my waist, pulling me against him. Our bodies were so close I could feel his heartbeat through his chest.

We stared into each other's eyes. I wanted to kiss him.

The urge came suddenly, fiercely. It felt like it was rising from somewhere deep inside me. I leaned in. He leaned in too. Our lips were only inches apart. I prepared myself for the kiss, already imagining how soft his lips would taste.

Then, at the very last second, he turned his head. His lips landed past my ear instead.

"Good night, Bella," he whispered.

The words sent a shiver down my spine.

Before I could say anything, he stepped back, leaving me standing there, breathless and stunned.

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+8 Bonus

The next morning, I opened my eyes slowly. For a moment, I forgot where I was.

Then I saw him.

Kane was sitting on the edge of my bed.

He wore a white shirt and beige pants. His sleeves were rolled slightly. The morning sunlight poured in through the window, falling over him. The sunlight made him look even more

ethereal. He looked calm and unreal – like something out of a fairytale.

He looks like Prince Charming, And that should scare me.

Our eyes met.

“How did you sleep?” he asked.

His voice was gentle. The sound alone sent warmth through my chest.

I pushed myself up on the bed, staring at him.

“What are you... doing here?” I asked.

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“I needed to check something,” he said.

He leaned forward and lifted his hand, gently brushing a few strands of hair away from my cheek. His fingers tucked them behind my ear with care.

“That’s why I came so early.” He whispered.

My mouth suddenly felt dry.

“What do you want to check?” I asked quietly.

His eyes stayed on mine. “You said you liked me last night,” he murmured.

My face heated instantly as memories rushed back.

“I remember,” I said softly, biting my lower lip.

And I meant it. I didn’t say it by mistake. I really meant it.

Somehow, without realizing it, I had fallen for him. And that scared me.

“You also said you wanted to date me,” he added calmly.

I froze. I can’t remember saying that.

66

Ah," I breathed.

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Then I remembered how he had held me last night.

"Tell me, Bella," he said. "What should I do to make you **only** see me?"

"You mean..." I hesitated. "You want to be my boyfriend?"

He smiled "A boyfriend You want to go on dates with me?"

His voice was low but there was clear excitement beneath it.

My mind went blank. Date him? We were already married.

"This is ridiculous," I said softly.

He shook his head. "I know this is an arranged marriage but it doesn't count to me. I want to do it right this time."

Warmth spread through my chest at his words.

"Then let's date," he said. "What do you think, Sis?"

I couldn't answer. He moved closer till his lips were near my ear.

"You promised me," he whispered. "And I won't let you take it back."

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+8 Bonus

His eyes were firm. He had this determined look on his face.

My thoughts tangled into a mess.

"I... I need time," I finally said. "I'll think about it."

He didn't look disappointed. He looked patient.

"Alright then" he smiled "Take all the time you need"

P

Later, when I arrived at the restaurant, my mind was still foggy.

I didn't see Jazz anywhere. Mrs. Sinclair stood at the counter, holding Riley in her arms.

"Where's Jazz?" I asked.

"She stepped out," Mrs. Sinclair replied awkwardly. "She'll be back."

I took Riley from her arms and played with him. He smiled brightly, clearly happy to see me. I spoke to him softly, using my broken sign language.

I hoped Jazz could buy his cochlear implant soon.

7/9

09:31

+8 Bonus

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JAZZ'S POV

I stood inside Eric's large office with my hands clenched tightly. Fear gripped my chest. I had never imagined I would come here willingly.

"My beta said you've been asking to see me," Eric said calmly.

"I came to ask for help," I said humbly.

His eyes were filled with intrigue.

"It was you," he said. "I knew I recognized you"

He did recognize me. The fact that he knew who I was made heart beat increase.

my

"I-" I started.

"Let me guess. You came to beg me not to tell Ian Adams."

My body shuddered at the name. The name alone brought bad memories to me, memories that I'd much rather forget.

"Yes," I admitted. "Please. I just want peace."

"You know he's been searching for you," Eric said with a small smile.

8/9

09:31

Of course, he was. That was why I was scared. He couldn't find me. I'd spent my years avoiding him.

"I just want to live quietly," I pleaded. "I'm not hurting anyone."

Eric chuckled.

"Really?" he said. "Everyone believes you caused his girlfriend to miscarry."

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JAZZ'S POV

+8 Bonus

When Eric said those words, my world seemed to collapse all over again.

That name... that accusation... it never left me.

No matter how many times I denied it, no matter how much I begged or cried, no one ever believed me.

I didn't do it. I never did. How could I be so cruel? I could

never do such a thing or even think of it. Yet the man I loved the most had been the one to destroy me with his own hands.

My chest got tight painfully as the memory surfaced.

Back then, when the police had come for me, when cold

handcuffs were locked around my wrists, I had turned to Ian in desperation.

“Have you ever loved me, Ian?” I had asked him.

I still remembered the way he looked at me. There was no hesitation.

“No,” he said coldly. “I hated your guts from the beginning. Jazz, I want you to live your whole life in pain.”

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+8 Bonus

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Those words cut me deeper than any blade.

So it was all a lie, I had realized then. Everything I believed in... everything I endured... was just my wishful thinking.

After that, I went to prison. Behind bars, I heard that he had gotten engaged to the woman he truly loved.

Meanwhile, I became the wicked woman people whispered about whenever my name appeared in the news. The woman who “caused a miscarriage.” The woman who “ruined a happy couple.”

I had to control myself to stop the tears from falling.

“I... I did not harm anyone,” I said. “I swear it. I didn’t hurt her. I didn’t hurt anyone.”

Why does no one believe me? Is telling the truth really this useless?

Eric didn’t interrupt me. Then, without warning, he changed the topic.

“When did Bella start working in your restaurant?” he asked.

I froze.

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+8 Bonus

“Huh?” I blurted out, completely caught off guard.

Why is he suddenly asking about Bella? It took me a moment to gather my thoughts. Well, at least he wasn’t talking about

Ian.

"About half a month ago," I replied honestly. "She came to apply as a delivery rider."

Eric nodded. "How does she usually behave at your restaurant?"

"She's... good," I said. "She works hard. She delivers orders quickly. She never complains, even when it's busy or when customers are difficult."

As I spoke, I noticed something strange. Eric rested his cheek against his hand, listening intently. There was a small smile on his lips. He looked really interested in what I had to say about Bella.

For some reason, the sight unsettled me. Eric Simpson was the most influential figure in the entertainment industry. Women surrounded him everywhere. I'm talking about beautiful, polished, glamorous women. Everyone knew that.

Bella, on the other hand, wore plain clothes. She never wore makeup. Her hands had calluses from rough work. What could someone like him possibly see in Bella? Did he like her? 3/9

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+8 Bonus

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When I finished speaking, Eric slowly turned his attention back to me.

"You said she told you she'd been to prison when she applied," he said. "Why did you hire her anyway? Weren't you afraid your restaurant would get into trouble?"

"Maybe it's because I've been to prison too," I said quietly. "I know what it feels like when you desperately want a chance to live normally again."

I paused, then added softly, "I could tell she really needed that job."

Eric murmured, "You feel for her..."

He seemed lost in thought for a moment.

"All right," he said calmly. "I'll help you. I won't tell Ian that I've seen you."

My heart jumped for joy. I felt so relieved, like a weight had been lifted off my chest.

“But,” he added, “I can’t guarantee no one else will tell him.”

I was still relieved. That was good news, for now

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- B Bonus

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“Thank you,” I said quickly. “Thank you so much, Mr. Simpson.”

I bowed my head slightly.

As I looked at him, I felt worried again. Why was he so interested in Bella?

If he really has feelings for Bella... is that a good thing?

I knew the kind of man Eric was. He changed women like clothes.

I knew it was none of my business but now, Bella felt less like my employee and more like my friend. We had gotten so close.

And that scared me for her.

THIRD PERSON’S POV

Around noon, Alex Jameson received a call from his landlord.

“Someone entered your place yesterday,” the landlord snapped.

Alex was shocked. How was that possible?

“What do you mean someone entered?” he shouted. “I rented that room! How dare you open it without my permission?” 5/9

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*8 Bonus

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The landlord exploded.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve!” he yelled. “I rented the room for you to live in, not to store an urn ! If it weren’t for you, the police wouldn’t have inspected my house and ordered renovations!”

Alex clenched his fist.

"I'm renovating the place," the landlord continued. "I'm not refunding your rent or deposit!"

The call ended abruptly. Alex stared at his phone, furious.

Yolanda rushed over.

"What happened?" she asked anxiously.

"The landlord said someone went there last night and took the urn!" Alex snapped.

Yolanda's eyes widened.

"They took it? Then what about the fifty million?" she exclaimed. "Without the urn, that girl won't give us the money!"

Her mind raced. She had already planned all the trips and the

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other things she would

buy with that money. She knew Bella was desperate and would do anything to get to her mother's grave. This was supposed to be a win situation for her and Alex.

Shit.

"She must have had someone take it," she said.

Alex's eyes narrowed. "I still need that money" he thought to himself.

He had

to think of something....fast. He needed a contingency plan. He grabbed his phone and dialed Bella.

When she answered, his tone softened.

"Bella," he said. "I've thought about it. We're still father and daughter."

Bella felt sick hearing his voice.

"If you can't give fifty million at once," Alex continued, "give half first. I'll tell you where your mother is buried."

"You've been getting along with Kane, haven't you?" he added. "Money shouldn't be a problem for him."

Bella's chest tightened. So this is all my father sees. 7/9

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+8 Bonus

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"I already got Mom's ashes," she said calmly. "I buried her yesterday."

Alex exploded. For a moment, his vision blurred. She what?

How?

"It was you!" he shouted. "What right do you have to take her ashes? I'm her husband!"

"So you remember you're her husband?" Bella replied coldly. "She wouldn't have acknowledged you even if she were alive."

"You insolent brat!" he yelled. "I'm your father!"

"When you burned Mom's photo albums," Bella said,, "you stopped being my father."

"My blood runs through your veins!" Alex roared "You can't change the fact".

"Oh really?" she sounded bored.

"You'd better tell me where you buried her," he threatened. "Even Kane can't help you!"

Then another voice cut in.

"Oh? Why don't you try and see if I can help her or not?"

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+8 Bonus

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Alex froze. Kane?

Before he could react, the call ended. He stared at his phone in shock.

“She took the urn,” he growled to Yolanda. “And Kane is backing her.”

Yolanda sneered. “How did Kane end up with an ex-con like her?” she scoffed. “She killed his fiancée.”

Alex said nothing. He was deep in thought. What should he do? If he knew Alpha Stonewood was backing Bella, he might have been nicer to her. Now, there’s no telling what she could do.

“Kathy is different,” Yolanda added smugly. “She’s Eric’s girlfriend now. She paid for this trip.”

Alex sighed. All my hopes are on Kathy now.

And yet, he still felt uneasy.

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chapter 267

VIOLET’S POV

Damn it.

+8 Bonus

I don’t expect to see Selene this soon.

“Well,” Selene says, clapping once. “That didn’t take long.”

My fingers curl at my sides. I force myself not to step back.

“You followed me,” I s

I say.

She tilts her head with mock surprise on her face.

“Is that what you call this?” Her eyes sweep over me, from my torn sleeves to the dirt on my boots. “I thought you were setting a trap.”

Heat flares in my chest. I feel several emotions inside me Anger. Embarrassment. Fear.

“A real trap,” she continues, walking in a slow circle around me, “takes patience and control” She clicks her tongue. “Not panic.”

I turn to keep her in my sight. “You talk too much.”

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+8 Bonus

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She laughs. "And you think too loudly."

My heart pounds harder. She can feel it. I'm sure she can. She can always feel it.

"You couldn't even steal it in time," Selene says. "I expected more from the girl everyone keeps whispering about."

I lift my chin. "And I expected you to wait longer before showing your face."

Her smile widens. "Why would I wait? You're tired, hungry and alone. Besides, I'm supposed to hunt you in here. You've just made my job easier"

That word hits hardest. Alone. She's right, whether I like it or

not.

I swallow and push the thought away. "If you're here to scare me, you're wasting your time."

"Oh, Violet," she says softly. "I'm here to remind you of your place."

Something in me snaps. I know Selene will attack me anyway. She can be sneaky and I don't want her to have the element of surprise. I'm in her territory now. She could have planned more traps here.

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+8 Bonus

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I don't wait for her to move.

I lunge.

We're not allowed to use our powers. That rule echoes in my head even as my body slams into hers. No magic. No shifting. Just close combat.

She reacts fast, faster than I expect. Her elbow drives into my ribs. Pain explodes through my side, stealing the air from my lungs. I grunt but don't stop. I swing anyway. My fist connects with her shoulder. The hit is solid but she barely flinches.

"You're predictable," Selene mutters, grabbing my wrist and twisting hard.

Pain shoots up my arm. I cry out and kick forward, catching her thigh. She hisses and shoves me back. I stumble back a bit.

We circle each other now, both breathing hard.

My hands shake. I hate that she can see it. I hate that I feel

weak.

She rushes me again. This time she doesn't hold back. Her fist slams into my stomach. I fold forward with a gasp. She grabs my hair and yanks my head back.

"Still relying on instinct," she says close to my ear. "Not 3/8

09:32

+8 Bonus

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thinking."

I slam my head backward. It connects with her nose. She swears and releases me. I spin around and shove her away, using every ounce of strength I have. She jumps on me and we both crash into the forest floor.

We roll down for what feels like forever. Dirt fills my mouth. Leaves scrape my skin. She's on top of me in a second. Her knees pin my arms. Her hands close around my throat.

Black dots dance in my vision. I start to panic.

No. No, no, no.

I buck and twist, managing to knee her side. She grunts but doesn't let go. Her grip tightens.

"Feel that?" she snarls. "That fear? That's who you are."

Something inside me screams.

My empathic sense flares without my permission. It bursts out of me hard. I feel more emotions now – Fear. Terror.

Desperation.

The forest answers.

Trees groan like they are waking from sleep. Roots tear 4/8

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+8 Bonus

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through the ground. The earth shakes under us.

Selene's eyes widen in shock "Stop!"

I shove her off as a root comes out between us. I scramble backward, coughing. My throat is burning. The ground splits where I was seconds ago.

I don't think. I run.

Pain tears through my leg. Something sharp slices my calf. I stumble but keep going. Branches keep tearing at my face but I duck as much as I can. Right now, my lungs are screaming for air.

Behind me, Selene shouts my name. She sounds frustrated.

I keep running. I don't stop until I can't hear her anymore.

When I finally collapse against a tree, my whole body shakes. Blood pours down my leg. My ribs ache with every breath.

I did that. I lost control.....again.

I slide down to the ground, clutching my side. Power isn't saving me. It's exposing-me.

Control. I need control.

5/8

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+8 Bonus

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Hours pass before I get the strength to move again. I move slowly through the forest, limping, careful not to leave a

clear trail. My stomach twists painfully. I haven't eaten since yesterday.

When I spot some berries, my heart lifts and sinks at the same time. I'm hungry but I'm not quick to eat them. They might be food or poison.

I remember the books that I've read. My wolf whispers inside me "Never rush. Watch first"

I kneel and study them. I look at their shape, colour and smell. I crush one between my fingers and wait. I don't feel any burning sensation. There's no numbness either.

I touch it to my tongue then wait again. Still, nothing.

I eat slowly, one at a time, listening to my body. I feel relieved when my stomach settles instead of revolting. I don't feel anything. That means the berries are safe. I eat more than pack as much as I can into my pockets.

I keep moving. Afterward, I find a hollow between roots and build a small fire. My hands shake as I strike the flint.

As the flames catch, warmth spreads across my skin. My eyes sting. As I sit to eat, I think of Trevor. His face fills my mind.

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+8 Bonus

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I think about him and how much I miss him – His laugh. His arms around me. The way he looks at me like I matter.

"I miss you," I whisper into the fire.

My chest aches. I don't know how long I can last out here. The Wraithwood isn't kind. It never has been.

Then Brandon's face slips in to my mind too. His image is uninvited.

Guilt twists my stomach.

Why do I think of him too? Why does it feel like betrayal? Why can't I choose between them? My wolf stirs inside me. she feels

restless.

You're tired, she says.

“I know,” I whisper.

“You’re scared”

“Yes.”

She presses closer. “But you’re alive”

I stare into the fire. “For now.”

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+8 Bonus

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I lie down near the flames, pulling my jacket tighter. Every sound makes me flinch. Every shadow feels like eyes watching

1. me.

The forest creaks. The fire burns.

I close my eyes, but sleep doesn’t come easy.

I admit something to myself – I’m afraid.

chapter 268

BELLA’S POV

+8 Bonus

Kane handed the phone back to me.

“What do you want me to do about your father?” he asked.

He was smiling, but I knew that smile well by now. It was the kind that meant he was holding himself back. I could feel it clearly – if

I said the word, he would destroy my father without hesitation.

He would really do it.

That thought scared me a little. It also made my chest feel tight in a strange way. I was certain that Kane would do anything to keep me safe. He would burn the world if I told him to.

"It's alright," I said quietly. "It's good for me and him to end up like this."

Kane looked at me closely, as if trying to see through my words.

"It's not like he crossed some impossible line," I continued. "He just... finished breaking the last bit of affection I still had."

I already knew who he was. I was just hoping there was

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+8 Bonus

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something left.

I had believed my father still cared about my mother, even a little. After all, they married for love. My mother married him when he had nothing. She stood by him at his worst.

But now I knew. That belief had been nothing more than my own wishful thinking.

Time was cruel. No matter how deeply two people once loved each other, love could still rot and disappear completely.

I felt Kane's body tense beside me. Suddenly, he pulled me into his arms.

The movement was sudden. He held me firmly as if he was afraid I might slip away.

He doesn't want to let go, I realized.

My cheek pressed against his chest. For a moment, I stood there stiffly. Then his arms tightened, too tight.

"Kane..." I whispered.

My voice trembled. The sound of his name made his body shiver. I felt it clearly. He loosened his grip slightly but didn't release me.

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"Say my name again," he murmured.

His voice was low and hoarse. It slid into my ears and settled deep in my chest.

Why does this feel so dangerous? Why does it feel so warm at the same time?

“Kane,” I said softly.

A slow smile spread across his face.

“That sounds so good,” he said.

I looked up at him, stunned. Just saying his name makes him this happy?

For the first time, I was certain that Kane had feelings for me.

But the thought that followed was colder. How long will those feelings last?

My mother must have believed my father loved her deeply when she married him, yet there was nothing left in his heart for her in the end. I had once believed Damien was my future. I had believed I found the right man. And he had turned his back on me without mercy.

“Do you think I’m just fooling around with you too?” Kane 3/9

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+6 Bonus

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asked suddenly.

The question hit me hard. I froze. That thought had crossed my mind more times than I wanted to admit.

Even if he was serious now... how long would it last? A year? Two? Or just a few months?

I didn’t trust love anymore.

“Tell me,” he continued, staring straight into my eyes. “What do I have to do to convince you that I’m not playing with you?”

My heart pounded violently. Then he said the words that almost made me stop breathing.

“Why don’t we get married, then?”

I stared at him.

“For real,” he added. “This time.”

“Get... married?” I repeated.

“Yes,” Kane said calmly, as if this was the most natural thing in the world. “I don’t want another woman in my life. That means you’re the only one I’ll ever have by my side. So what’s wrong with marrying you?”

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+8 Bonus

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“But-”

“Or do you not want to marry me, Sis?” he asked quietly.

His fingertips brushed against my cheek. My skin burned where he touched me. He reminded me, without words, that we were already married in name. My mind was a mess.

I never even thought about this.

Dating him alone already felt unreal. Marriage had never crossed my mind. Kane looked at my expression and seemed both amused and helpless.

“If it were any other woman,” he said slowly, “she would’ve imagined marrying me a long time ago.”

Then he leaned closer. “Didn’t you agree to date me with marriage in mind? Or are you planning to play with my feelings. and throw me away?”

My breath caught. “What...?”

“Or,” he continued softly, “are you already thinking about breaking up with me?”

I opened my mouth to speak but before I could say anything, his lips pressed down on mine in a kiss.

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+8 Bonus

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The kiss was fierce.

He pried my lips open, leaving me no room to think, no room to resist. His breath surrounded me. His warmth was

overwhelming as my lips moved against his. My thoughts scattered completely. The kiss was deep and intense. I could barely breathe. My fingers clenched at his clothes as my knees weakened.

When he finally pulled back, I was shaking. Half my weight rested against his arms.

“You’d better not even think about breaking up,” he murmured. “Now that you’ve agreed to date me, I’m the only one you can date. And I will only date you.”

I really can’t get rid of him, I realized.

And maybe... I didn’t want to.

After lunch in his office, I checked the time, fixed my clothes, and prepared to leave. When I stepped outside, I met Jayden.

“Are you leaving, Miss Jameson?” he asked politely.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Please be careful on your way back.”

6/9

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+8 Bonus

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As I entered the elevator, I heard a man beside Jayden whisper, “Who is she?”

Jayden paused, then said calmly, “Someone we cannot mess with.”

I returned to the restaurant and continued delivering orders.

Kane ordered food constantly. Every time, he asked me to deliver it personally and stay for lunch.

I felt guilty. This isn’t really part of my job, I thought. But I couldn’t refuse him.

The restaurant earned too much from his orders. Only later did I realize Jazz hadn’t returned.

"Where's Jazz?" I asked.

"Riley caught a cold," Mrs. Sinclair said. "She took him to a clinic."

In the afternoon, Jazz returned with Riley asleep on her back. I quickly helped her.

"Is he okay?" I asked.

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.8 Bonus

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"It's just a small cold," she said, forcing a smile.

She looked exhausted. She had dark circles under her eyes. She looked like she hadn't slept in days.

"You should rest," I said gently.

She shook her head. "I'm just worried. He can't express discomfort well."

"He'll be fine," I told her. "And you will too."

She looked at me in surprise. "You've changed," she said.

I froze in shock. What did she mean? "Have I?"

"Yes," she said softly. "You look like you have hope now."

Hope.....Is that what this feeling is?

That night, when I left the restaurant, I saw Kane's car waiting.

"Get in," he said.

"I'm riding my bike," I replied "I can manage. Besides, I have to bring this bike tomorrow so I might as well drive it home"

I didn't feel comfortable riding in a Maybach while working as a delivery rider. It was kind of ...weird. 8/9

09:33

+8 Bonus

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"I'll bring you tomorrow," he said, smiling. Before I could say anything else, he took my hand and pulled me inside. I had no choice but to get in.

"When did you arrive?" I asked.

"Around six-thirty."

I stared at him in disbelief. He waited over two hours.

"You didn't have to wait," I said.

"I wanted to see you sooner," he replied.

He lowered his head and kissed my fingertips gently.

My heart tightened.

This man...

He leaned in and kissed me. It was tender, slow, and possessive.

I couldn't resist. I cupped his cheeks in my hands and kissed him just as passionately.

Maybe... just maybe... I can trust him.

And just like that, we started dating.

chapter 270

BELLA'S POV

+8 Bonus

"Great! Thank you, thank you!" Jazz exclaimed into the phone.

Her voice was so loud that I stopped what I was doing and turned to look at her.

Jazz rarely showed emotions like this. She was usually calm and composed. She was a very gentle person.

But now, her hands were shaking as she held the phone, and her eyes were bright with tears that refused to fall.

Something important must have happened. I was a bit excited, hoping she had good news.

She ended the call and turned toward me. Her face was flushed with excitement.

“What happened, Jazz?” I asked.

Before I could react, she rushed forward and hugged me tightly.

“It’s the hospital,” she said breathlessly. “They have a **special** support program for deaf children from poor families. They called me just now.”

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I froze for a second.

“A program?” I repeated.

She nodded again and again. She basically squealed and jumped up for joy. I could see the relief in her eyes. She hugged me tightly.

+8 Bonus

“They said an expert in cochlear implants is willing to examine Riley,” she continued. “If he fits their requirements, they’ll replace his current implant with a more advanced one. For free.”

Her voice broke with tears. She sobbed, happy tears “I... I never dared to make an appointment with such an expert before. I couldn’t afford it.”

She laughed and cried at the same time. “I feel like I’m dreaming.”

I hugged her back gently, patting her shoulder.

Riley will finally have a chance, I thought. A real chance. Thank the goddess.

But deep down, I knew the truth.

Kane did this.

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+8 Bonus

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That evening, when I returned to Stonewood Residence, I found Kane sitting casually on the sofa. He had one arm rested on the backrest, his chin supported by his hand. He looked relaxed, confident, and dangerously charming.

I stood there for a moment before speaking. "Thank you."

He lifted his eyes and smiled "What are you thanking me for?"

"For helping Riley," I said softly.

He stood up and walked toward me. Before I could react, his arm slid around my shoulders, pulling me into him. I gasped softly as I lost my balance and fell into his arms.

"You can like that boy," he said calmly, "but don't like him more than me."

His tone was domineering, yet there was a teasing hint in it.

"He's a kid" I muttered

"So? I don't like it when I'm not the person you care about the most."

My heart skipped. Kane couldn't be serious, could he? He's jealous... of a child?

3/8

09:36

+8 Bonus

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I tried to push myself up, placing my palm against his chest. He was wearing a thin silk robe. The warmth of his body passed straight through the fabric into my hand.

I froze. He's warm... too warm.

For a moment, my mind wandered. I wondered what was underneath that robe. Was he wearing clothes or was he.....?

The thought of those rock hard abs under my palms made me blush. What if I trailed my hands lower? What if I....?

Goddess, Bella. What is wrong with you?

I blushed and tried to pull my hand back, but his fingers closed around my wrist, holding me firmly in place.

“You’re blushing just from this?” he murmured. “Why?”

Then his voice lowered. “We’re a couple now. You can touch me anywhere you want.”

My mind went blank. Does he even hear himself?

“Do you want to?” he asked, looking straight into my eyes.

“No... no thanks,” I stammered.

A hint of disappointment flashed in his eyes before he chuckled 4/8

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softly.

“By the way,” he said casually, “you’re free on Saturday afternoons, right?”

“Yes... why?”

“Make yourself available. I’ll take you to the hospital for a physical examination.”

I blinked repeatedly in confusion “A physical examination?”

“You haven’t had one in years,” he said. “It’s necessary.”

I pressed my lips together. It’s been almost four years, since prison.

“All right,” I said quietly.

That night, when I was about to go to sleep, Kane entered my room.

He had a small smile on his face “I’ll sleep here.”

I widened my eyes. As soon as he said those words, I started to panic.

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“You... you’re sleeping here too?” I asked.

“Is there a problem?” he replied calmly. He tilted his head a bit “We slept together at the cabin.”

That was different. Back then, I saw him as family.

Now...

“I’m used to sleeping alone,” I said weakly.

He looked at me and smiled. “You told me before that you liked sleeping with me.”

Damn me and my big mouth. I had no words. That excuse was terrible.

“We’ve just started dating,” I said honestly. “I’m not ready for... that.”

He laughed softly. “For what?”

He leaned closer till his face was inches from mine. I could feel his breath on my lips. We were close, too close. I had the urge to kiss him again.

“You think I want to do something to you?” he whispered.

He leaned in and kissed my neck. I shivered.

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“I’ll just sleep. Like before,” he said gently. “I won’t force you.” Then he lowered his voice. “But if you want me... I’m yours.”

My heart pounded. Oh no.

“May I, Sis?” he murmured softly. “I just want to be close.”

I couldn’t say no. By the time I realized it, we were already in bed.

I stared at the ceiling, unable to sleep. I had one question at the back of my mind.

“Why do you still call me Sis?” I asked.

“Don’t you like it?”

“It’s just... strange,” I said. “We’re dating.”

“I’ll call you Bella in public,” he replied. “Sis *is* just for us.”

He paused. “When I call you that, it feels like we’re connected. It’s something that we both understand”

I didn’t fully understand, but my heart felt strangely warm. It meant something special to him, I guess.

“Sleep,” he said.

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I left the lamp on. He noticed.

With that, I closed my eyes.

And before I realized it, I fell asleep.