

Through Rising Fog We Walk Paths Unknown Yet Comforting

chapter 271

BELLA'S POV

By

then, it was already very clear to me that these people had never intended to solve the issue peacefully. From the moment they pointed out the so-called "bug," everything they said afterward had been carefully calculated.

They were blackmailing us from the start.

I straightened my back and looked at them calmly, forcing myself not to show fear.

"I'm just an employee," I said slowly. "There's no need for you to threaten me."

My fingers curled slightly at my side. Stay calm, Bella. Don't let them see weakness.

"As for this lunchbox," I continued,, "you can keep it for the police. They can investigate where the bug came from."

I paused and met their eyes one by one.

"And if you're determined to cause trouble for a small restaurant like ours," I added coldly, "we'll sue you. By then, it won't be a small matter anymore."

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+8 Bonus

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The words came out firm, but my heart was racing.

Jazz can barely keep the restaurant running. Riley needs money for his cochlear implant... and for speech training later. I won't let these people destroy everything she worked for.

If things truly got out of control, I had already decided that I would go to Kane for help. I didn't want to rely on him, but I would not hesitate if it meant protecting Jazz and Riley.

Justice has always been in my blood.

That was why I became a doctor back then. I wanted to help people who couldn't protect themselves, especially people who were victims of abuse.

When I finished speaking, the men's expressions changed instantly. The confidence they had moments ago drained from their faces. One of them glanced around nervously, clearly hesitating.

Just as I turned to leave, someone suddenly grabbed my arm.

"Hey-!" he screamed.

The grip was rough and unexpected. My phone slipped from my hand and fell to the ground with a cracking sound.

"Boss! She's recording!" someone shouted after seeing the 2/8

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screen.

+8 Bonus

My heart sank. Before I could react, one of them cursed loudly and raised his hand.

"How dare you trick us!" he screamed.

I closed my eyes and lifted my arm to protect my face, waiting for his hit. Not again...

But the pain never came. Instead, I felt a firm hand on my shoulder, pulling me into a colder, solid embrace.

Gasps erupted around us. I opened my eyes.

A familiar, handsome face appeared before me. His jaw was tense, and his eyes were dark with anger.

"What's going on?" he asked.

Eric's voice was terrifyingly cold. He was gripping the man's wrist so tightly that the man's face turned pale, sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"I—I'm sorry, Master Simpson," the man stammered,

Fear flashed through his eyes—not because of the pain, but because he had recognized who Eric was. The others rushed to

explain.

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"She's just a delivery girl! There was a bug, in the food! Things got heated, that's all!"

They were desperate now, eager to end this quickly, Pave ignored them and looked down at me.

"Are you all right?" he asked me. His voice softened slightly. His expression was filled with concern,

"I'm fine," I replied quietly.

If he hadn't arrived...what would have happened?

I glanced at my phone

on the ground and bent down to pick it up, but Eric was faster. He picked it up and handed it to me.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, taking it back and checking it.

Luckily, it wasn't damaged. Around us, the crew members stared in disbelief. They had never seen Eric bend down for anyone like that. It was obvious

Eric turned back to me. "Tell me what happened."

He didn't ask anyone else. He only wants my version.

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I explained everything clearly and calmly, from the bug to the demand for compensation and the recording.

When I mentioned the recording, his brow lifted slightly.

“May I listen to it?” he asked.

The men’s faces went completely white.

I opened up my phone then played it for him to hear. After listening, Eric’s expression darkened.

The director and production assistants standing nearby also understood immediately what had happened. Their faces stiffened.

“This is our fault,” the director said quickly. “We didn’t manage our temporary staff properly. I apologize on behalf of the crew.”

“If you want compensation-”

“No,” I interrupted. “I don’t want compensation.”

I took a deep breath. “I just don’t want anyone bothering our restaurant again.”

Jazz doesn’t need more trouble. Let this end quietly.

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“Of course,” the director agreed hastily, glancing at Eric.

Satisfied, I turned to leave. I had barely taken two steps when someone grabbed my arm again.

I froze and turned back. Eric looked just as surprised as I felt.

“It’s nothing,” he said after a moment, looking at his hand. “Your shoelace is loose.”

Before I could react, he knelt down. Gasps spread through the crowd. Everyone was watching us with wide eyes and their mouths open. With careful movements, he tied my shoelace neatly.

My face burned. I felt embarrassed. He was literally on his knees for me. everyone was watching. Some were even recording. This is too much...

Fans outside the fence whispered excitedly. Phones were raised.

Eric stood up slowly "There"

"Thank you," I murmured, my head lowered.

I left quickly, before he could see anything else.

THIRD PERSON'S POV

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From a nearby café, Kathy watched everything unfold. Her nails dug into her palms.

Why is Bella always near him?

Jealousy twisted her chest. She couldn't allow Eric to realize the truth.

I can't lose him.

Back on set, Eric's expression turned cold.

"I don't want this to happen again," he said. "These people don't need to stay."

The men's faces went pale. They shook with fear.

"If she hadn't chosen to let it go," Eric continued, his voice cold, "you'd already be in jail."

No one dared argue. They knew he was right. Eric could single handedly throw them in jail for the rest of their lives without trial and no one – absolutely no one – would be able to bail them out.

That was how powerful he was.

Outside, fans buzzed with speculation.

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“Who was she?”

“Is that his new girlfriend?”

“How long until he dumps the current one?”

Rumors spread like wildfire. Everyone wondered who the special woman who Alpha Eric Simpson got on his knees for,

was.

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BELLA'S POV

When I returned to the small restaurant, the bell above the door had barely stopped ringing before Jazz rushed toward me. Her face was pale, and her eyes searched me from head to toe.

“What took you so long?” she asked anxiously. “Did those people do anything to you?”

I shook my head immediately.

“I’m all right,” I said. “Nothing happened.”

I don’t want her to worry.

Jazz let out a long breath, her shoulders finally dropping.

“Thank God,” she murmured. “If they really want to make a scene, I’ll just pay them. Money can be earned again, but I don’t want anyone in the restaurant to get hurt.”

My heart melted when I heard that. She’s willing to sacrifice everything she has just to keep everyone safe.

“No,” I said firmly. “It’s all taken care of.”

Jazz looked at me in surprise.

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“I don’t think those people will dare to come back,” I

continued. “If they’re smart, they won’t risk it again for such a small amount of money.”

“You called the police?”

“No. I just happened to meet... someone I know. He helped settle it.”

Jazz’s eyes widened. “Your friend?” she asked quickly. “Then we should thank him properly . I’ll buy some gifts later, and you can take them to him.”

“It’s really not necessary,” I said, quickly changing the subject. “How’s Riley? Did the hospital call?”

At the mention of her son, Jazz’s face softened immediately.

“They said his medical report will be ready in a couple of days,” she said happily. “If everything looks good, he can get the cochlear implant right away.”

Her voice shook slightly with excitement.

I couldn’t help but smile at her. I was so happy. I had so much joy in my heart for her. She really deserved this and more. She’s been waiting for this for so long.

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“The hospital also said I qualify for a discount because of my financial situation,” she added. Her eyes were bright with

excitement.

“That’s great,” I said sincerely.

It must be Kane.

I didn’t say it out loud, but I knew it in my heart. And the thought of Riley finally being able to hear filled me with warmth.

The incident from earlier felt like it had already passed.

But in the evening, just before closing, Jazz suddenly stopped

1. me.

“Bella,” she asked carefully, “was it Eric who helped us today?”

I froze. My eyes widened as I looked at her.

How does she know? How did she guess it?

Seeing my expression, Jazz immediately understood.

“A customer was eating here earlier,” she explained. “They showed me a video online. It was you arguing with those men during delivery. Eric appeared later. I saw him clearly.”

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My heart skipped a beat. I felt my heart rate pick up at the thought of being online.

“There’s a video?” I asked in shock.

“Yes,” Jazz said, pulling out her phone. “Let me show you.”

She typed quickly, but her frown deepened as she scrolled through her phone. She looked confused.

“It’s gone,” she muttered.

I took out my phone and searched as well.

There was nothing. Not a single clip. How is that possible?

My lips pressed together.

Someone powerful deleted everything.

Only one person could do that so fast.

Eric...

KANE’S POV

I sat alone in front of my computer. The screen glowed in front of me, and the video played again.

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I didn't move. I didn't blink.

My eyes stayed fixed on the image of Bella. She was there... standing in the open, surrounded by people.

I watched her face closely. I saw the way she tried to stay calm, the way she spoke firmly even when she was clearly under pressure.

Then I saw one of the men grab her arm. My jaw tightened. My wolf growled inside me.

Touch her again and you die.

I leaned forward slightly when I saw her phone fall to the ground. I saw her raise her hand, trying to shield herself.

The sight made me pissed. She thought she was about to be hit.

Then Eric appeared. I watched as he stepped in front of her, watched as he grabbed the man's wrist. I watched the fear spread across those men's faces when they recognized him.

I should have felt relieved. Instead, my blood boiled even more.

Because then I saw it. Eric turned to Bella. I heard how his voice softened. His eyes changed. 5/10

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That look...

I knew that look far too well. I had seen it before, years ago on Eric's face, whenever that little girl was mentioned.

No...

Then the scene that made my blood turn cold played out in front of me. Eric knelt down. He went down on one knee. He reached for Bella's shoelace and tied it carefully, gently, as if she were something precious.

My hands clenched into fists so hard that my knuckles turned white.

Don't touch her like that.

"She's mine," I muttered under my breath.

I leaned back in my chair. My breathing turned slow but heavy.

I knew Eric. I had known him since I returned to the

Stonewoods.

In our circle, friendships were rarely sincere. They were built on balance, on power, on appearances. Eric and I were "friends" on the surface. We drank together. We talked business. We smiled at each other at events. But I knew how

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prond he was. I knew how stubborn he was how obsessive he could become when it came to that girl from his past,

And now it seemed like she was right in front of him.

Standing beside me, Jayden shifted nervously,

"Make sure none of the people who embarrassed Bella today walk away clean," I said coldly

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"Yes, sir," Jayden replied immediately,

I kept my eyes on the screen and spoke again. "Tell me Homething."

Jayden straightened. "Yes, sir?"

“Would Bella be interested in men like Eric?”

Jayden choked slightly. “Miss Jameson is your girlfriend, Young, Master Stonewood,” he said quickly. “She wouldn’t-”

“What if she wasn’t?” I cut him off.

My voice stayed calm, but inside, something, was burning violently in me.

“What if she wasn’t my girlfriend?” I repeated. “Would she like him then?”

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Jayden hesitated. “I think...Miss Jameson is conservative

when it comes to relationships. She’s loyal. Once she gives her heart to someone, she doesn’t change easily.”

Loyal...

“She was loyal to Damien once,” I said coldly.

Jayden nodded. “Yes. But Damien betrayed her.”

That word hit me hard. Betrayed.

My breathing stalled for a second.

Jayden continued “Breaking up with her when she needed him most—that was betrayal. With Miss Jameson’s character, she would never forgive something like that.”

The room felt smaller. Betrayal...

If Damien’s actions counted as betrayal... Then what about mine? My vision blurred slightly.

I reached for the glass of water on the table, but my hand was shaking violently.

Why can’t I stop shaking?

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The glass slipped from my fingers and shattered against the desk.

“Get out,” I growled.

“As you wish,” he said quickly before leaving the room.

The door closed behind him as he left. I leaned back in my chair, breathing heavily.

“If I had known...” I whispered. “If I had known I would love her like this...”

My chest ached so badly it felt like it was tearing apart.

“If she finds out,” I murmured, my voice hoarse, “will she see it as betrayal too?”

My body shook harder.

No...

Only a few people knew the truth.

As long as they stayed silent... As long as she never found out... She would never hate me.

She would never leave me.

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“I’m sorry, Bella,” I whispered into the empty room.

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BELLA’S POV

When I returned to Stonewood Residence, the house was completely dark.

The silence in the house felt thick, almost heavy, and for a moment, I hesitated at the door.

Did Kane come back yet? Why are there no lights on?

I lifted my hand, about to switch on the lamp near the entrance, when suddenly a pair of arms wrapped around me from behind.

I went still for half a second. Then I smelled him.

That familiar scent – clean, a bit woody, was mixed with something else. The smell of him instantly settled my nerves.

Kane.

My body relaxed before my mind could even catch up. Even without my wolf. I could recognize his scent anywhere.

His chest pressed against my back. His body felt warm against mine. His arms tightened around my waist, pulling me fully into him, as if he had been waiting for this exact moment. b9:39

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couldn't help but melt into him.

My body in his just felt...right.

"Hi" he whispered in my ear.

"Hi. Why didn't you turn on the lights?" I asked softly.

It did feel strange. Kane usually liked the lights on. He didn't enjoy darkness the way I did.

"I miss you," he replied instead, deliberately avoiding my question.

His voice was low and so close to my ear. My heart skipped.

He missed me... just like that?

Heat rushed to my face instantly. I was grateful it was dark. If he saw me blushing like this, I wouldn't know where to hide.

"Did you miss me today?" he asked again.

This time, I felt his breath against my neck.

The sensation made my skin prickle. I swallowed.

My attention focused entirely on that one spot where his breath touched me. I could tell how close his lips were. Just a 2/8

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little closer, and they would touch my ear.

My thoughts tangled.

Why does he have to stand this close? Why does my heart feel like it's racing out of control ?

Before I could answer, a gently kind of pain suddenly came from my ear.

I gasped softly. It took me a second to realize what he was doing. He was biting my earlobe. His bite wasn't hard. It was more....intimate.

My body reacted instantly. A shiver ran down my spine, and my legs weakened slightly.

"Kane..." I whispered.

"Did you miss me?" he asked again. His voice was deeper now.

"I did..." I admitted. My voice was barely louder than a breath.

It was the truth. I had thought about him more than I wanted to admit.

"Well... let me go first," I said quickly. "I just came in. I need to put my bag down."

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My breathing was uneven because of how much his presence affected me. We were close, too close. The air between us felt so heavy it made my chest tight.

Instead of letting go, his arms tightened around me.

“Do you love me?” he asked suddenly.

The question stunned me. My thoughts froze.

Love? Now?

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to be honest.

“I... like you,” I said slowly.

I wasn't lying. I truly liked him. But love was different.

Love was something sacred to me. It wasn't something I could say lightly, not after everything I had been through.

I expected him to be upset. I expected him to push, to insist. But he didn't.

He held me tighter instead.

“But I love you, Sis,” he murmured. His voice shook **slightly**. “I love you so much that I don't know what I'd do if I lost **you**.”

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I gasped. His words sent a wave of warmth through my heart.

“I love you so much that my life would feel meaningless if I couldn't spend it with you.” He whispered.

His words poured into my ears like a confession he had been holding back for too long.

“I love you so much that I can't control my emotions anymore.”

I froze. What... is he saying?

My heart pounded painfully. How could someone love this deeply already?

For a moment, I wanted to deny it. I wanted to believe these were just sweet words spoken in the heat of the moment.

But another part of me argued quietly.

Kane isn't someone who sweet-talks. He doesn't need to. It felt like he was laying his heart bare, without hiding anything.

I had always thought his feelings were gentle affection. I never imagined his love would be this intense.

"I'm not asking you to fall in love with me right away," he whispered. "I just want your affection to be one-tenth of my love."

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His voice softened then "I just want you to like me a little more."

Slowly, he turned me around so I faced him. Moonlight came in through the window, outlining his face.

I couldn't see his expression clearly, but I knew he was looking at me. I lifted my hand and pressed my palm against his cheek.

His skin was warm beneath my hand.

"All right," I said seriously. "I'll like you more."

As soon as I said it, something inside me settled. For now, I wanted to take him seriously. I said those words looking into his eyes and I meant every single word. His body shuddered.

Then he leaned down and kissed me. This time, he didn't hold back. The kiss deepened naturally, slowly. Our lips moved together in sync, like we had done this a thousand times before.

His lips were soft. They tasted sweet. They were....perfect. I responded to his kiss, moving my lips against his just as passionately.

By the time he pulled away, I was breathless, barely standing. His kiss made me weak in the knees.....literally.

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His arm tightened around my waist, holding me upright.

“You said it yourself,” he murmured. He used his fingers to brush over my lips. “You’ll like me... and then fall in love with me.”

My face burned.

“Promise me something,” he added softly. “Promise you’ll forgive me if I ever do something wrong.”

I blinked in confusion. Why would he say that? Did he plan to hurt me?

“Wrong?” I asked. “What do you mean?”

He hesitated. “I’m afraid you’ll leave me if I make a mistake.”

I chuckled lightly “As long as it’s not something unforgivable, I’ll forgive you.”

“What counts as unforgivable?” he asked.

“If you cheat,” I said firmly. “If you love someone else.”

He answered immediately. “I’ll never love anyone else. You’re the only one.”

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He hugged me tightly. I hugged him back too, sighing heavily. Being in his arms made me feel saved. It made me feel...loved.

“Don’t forget what you promised me today,” he said hoarsely.

“I won’t”

Later, in the bathroom, I stared at my reflection.

My cheeks were still flushed. Kane really is strange tonight... He was acting strange but I couldn’t place my finger on it.

But when I thought about his words, my heart filled with warmth.

It had been so long since I felt like this.

And I couldn’t stop smiling.

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BELLA'S POV

After I finished showering, I dried my hair slowly and changed into my pajamas. When I was done, I stood there longer than necessary, staring at my reflection.

My face was still faintly red. My eyes were a little brighter than usual.

When I opened the bathroom door and stepped back into the bedroom, I froze. Kane was sitting on the edge of my bed.

He wasn't looking at me. He was holding the photo album I had left on the bedside table.

My heart skipped. For a split second, my mind went blank.

That album held the photos I valued most in the world. I had just bought it recently and carefully placed inside it the pictures I salvaged from the old, scorched album. Some of the photos were burned around the edges. Some were cracked. Some faces were half missing. Even so, I couldn't bear to throw them away.

They were all I had left. I stood there silently, watching him

turn a page.

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Did he see everything? Did he see my mother? Did he see how lonely I was even back then?

"You were so cute when you were little," Kane said suddenly, looking at me.

His tone was calm. I relaxed a little.

He wasn't mocking me. He wasn't probing. He wasn't even judging. He was simply... looking.

"Oh, stop flattering me," I replied lightly, forcing a small smile as I walked closer. "I wasn't that cute."

He didn't smile back. He looked at me seriously.

"You're beautiful to me," he said. He sounded so genuine "There's no woman more beautiful than you."

His words shocked me to my core. I felt the heat rush back to my face.

Why does he always say things like this so directly? Why does he never hesitate?

I stared at him for a moment, my mind completely blank. I wanted to respond, but no words came out. Compliments like that still made me uncomfortable. Not because I didn't want to hear them but because I wasn't used to someone saying them 2/8

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without asking for anything in return.

He looked back at the album and flipped another page.

"By the way," he asked casually, as if this were nothing important, "are all the photos of you as a child here?"

I paused and thought about it.

"I suppose so," I said slowly. "Back then, taking photos wasn't as easy as it is now. And after my mom passed away... there weren't many occasions worth recording."

My voice softened without me realizing it. There was a gap in the album – a long one. Kane noticed it too.

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"Then you'd better keep these photos well," he said. "Don't take the album with you everywhere. You might lose them."

For a second, my heart jumped.

Why would he say that? Did he mean anything else?

I pushed the thought away.

"Yes, I know," I replied quietly.

He placed the album back on the bedside table with care, as if

it were something precious.

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Then he reached out. Before I could react, his arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me into his chest.

I gasped softly. His body was warm, too warm.

He leaned in and breathed in my scent, slow and deep, as if he were trying to memorize it.

“Did anything happen today?” he asked in a low voice.

Images flashed through my mind. I remembered everything that happened today – the delivery. The argument. The bug in the lunchbox. The blackmail. Eric stepping in. The video.

My lips parted, but no words came out at first.

I hesitated. Should I tell him? Will he misunderstand? Will he be angry?

But then I remembered- We were a couple now. I didn't want secrets between us.

So, I told him everything. I told him about the dispute at noon. I told him how they tried to extort money. I told him how Eric stepped in and stopped them. I told him about the video being posted online.

I watched his **face** closely as I spoke. **There was** no surprise, no

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shock, no change in his expression.

That unsettled me more than anger would have.

“Did you know already?” I asked quietly.

“Yes,” he answered simply. “I saw the video.”

My eyes widened in shock. He saw it? I didn’t even see it myself.

How did he-?

“About that video...” I hurried to explain. “I have nothing to do with Eric. I mean – there’s nothing between us. I don’t want you to misunderstand.”

I didn’t know why I was suddenly nervous. Maybe because I remembered Jazz saying the comments online were wild. Maybe because I cared about what Kane thought more than I wanted to admit.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled me closer. His hands still rested firmly on my waist. He tilted his chin up to look at me.

“You’re not into Eric, are you?” he asked.

“Of course not,” I replied immediately. 5/8

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There was no hesitation in my answer. I wanted him to know that clearly. He was the only one I saw. He was the only man I was interested in. I didn’t want anyone else.

“What if he’s into you?” Kane asked.

I blinked. What?

I shook my head. “He’s Kathy’s boyfriend. And even if he had feelings for me... he still wouldn’t be the one I like.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. He noticed the wording. I said “wouldn’t”, not “couldn’t”.

“I don’t like playboys,” I added honestly. “He doesn’t seem loyal. Women probably come and go in his life. He could be interested in one today and someone else tomorrow.”

He smiled. He looked at me as if my answer pleased him.

“From now on,” he said softly, “you can only be attracted to me.”

My heart skipped. The way he said it wasn't a command. It was a quiet declaration.

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The next day, when I returned to the small restaurant, Jazz looked up from the counter and frowned.

"Bella, are you feeling unwell today?" she asked.

"Huh?" I asked, startled.

"Your face looks really red."

I touched my cheek subconsciously.

"Maybe I got sunburnt," I replied casually.

But I knew the truth.

That morning, before I left, Kane had knelt down in front of me and tied my shoelaces before I could stop him.

After that, he said calmly, "From now on, only I tie your shoelaces."

The memory alone made my heart race. I blushed then and I was still blushing now.

Then, without meaning to, I remembered Eric tying my shoelace the day before.

And suddenly, I wondered—Was Kane jealous?

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The thought startled me. And then... it made me smile.

I had never thought someone like him would feel jealous.

But somehow, knowing that he did....

It made my chest feel warm.

Chapter 275

JAZZ'S POV

I stood behind the counter and looked out through the wide glass window of the restaurant. The sky was covered in thick clouds. The clouds looked dull and heavy, the kind that made the day feel lower than it really was. The sunlight was there, but it couldn't break through.

I rested my elbows on the counter and sighed quietly. My mind drifted, even though I tried to stay focused on work.

I couldn't stop thinking about Bella....and Eric.

I had seen the video yesterday. The video showed how much Eric cared about her. I had never seen him act so gently with another woman. The video looked intimate.

I told Bella I believed her, and I meant it, but that didn't stop doubt from creeping in. Eric didn't look at Bella the way a man looked at a friend. There had been care in his eyes, too much

care.

Was Bella really telling me everything? Or was she protecting something... or someone?

I shook my head and forced myself to stop overthinking. Bella **had** been through enough. I didn't want to become a hen9:40

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person who doubted her.

I cleared my throat and turned toward her.

"By the way," I said, "Riley is going to have his operation soon."

Bella looked up at me immediately with a smile.

"My mom and I will be staying at the hospital for a few days to take care of him," I continued. "I'll close the restaurant while we're there. Don't worry, though. You'll still get paid as usual."

I watched her face carefully. She didn't hesitate. She looked really happy for me. Her smile got wider.

"Oh," she said gently. "Of course. That's completely fine."

"I'll send you a message when the restaurant reopens," I added.

"Sure," Bella replied. "Let me know when Riley's operation is over. I hope everything goes smoothly."

Her concern was real. She was a genuine person. The look on her face made my chest tighten.

"All right," I said with a small smile. "That's what I've been hoping for too."

I turned away before my eyes could sting.

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Closing the restaurant would hurt business. I knew that. Every day counted when you were barely keeping things afloat. But none of that mattered right now.

Riley mattered.

Once he had the cochlear implant, everything would change. And not in an easy way. I would have to help him learn what sound meant, help him understand words, teach him how to speak. Teach him how to live in a world that had already been unfair to him.

It's going to be hard. It's going to be exhausting. But I'm ready.

No matter how difficult it became, I would do it. I had to. Riley deserved a life that wasn't always uphill. He deserved a normal childhood like any other kid.

When the restaurant quieted down in the afternoon, I went through the small door that led to the house at the back.

I saw my mom sitting on the couch with Riley asleep in her arms.

A

My heart softened instantly at the sight of them. She moved carefully, gently placing him on the bed.

"Hey mom" I said.

3/9

09:40

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 275

She looked at me “Hi. What are you doing back here?”

“I just wanted to see Riley while I’m free,”

She smiled at me and shook her head. “You’re with him all day already. Tomorrow he’ll be hospitalized. You’ll be glued to him twenty–four hours a day. That should be enough for you.”

I looked at Riley. His small chest rose and fell steadily. Small tears filled my eyes. I started to feel a bit guilty.

“I did him wrong,” I said softly. “If I hadn’t taken the wrong medicine back then... maybe he wouldn’t be deaf.”

My mom stiffened immediately.

“It’s not your fault,” she snapped. “It’s that wicked woman’s fault. All of it.”

Her voice shook with anger.

“I was stupid,” I whispered. “I didn’t see through her. Riley should’ve been blessed by the moon goddess, but instead he got a mother like me.”

My voice broke as I continued to talk “Look at how he’s living now.”

4/9

09:40

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 275

My mom turned to me. Her eyes were full of pain.

“What nonsense are you saying?” she scolded. “Riley is lucky to have you. Stop talking like that.”

surgery

She took my hand and squeezed it. "Tomorrow is his day. After that, we still have a long road ahead. Save your strength for that."

I nodded slowly.

"All right," I said, forcing myself to breathe.

I bent down and kissed Riley's soft cheek then returned to the restaurant.

I didn't expect what I saw next. Eric was sitting there.

My steps slowed as I noticed him. Why is he here again?

The image from yesterday's video flashed through my mind. I couldn't stop thinking about the way he stood in front of Bella, the way he looked at her.

Was he here because of her?

The moment he spoke, my suspicion was confirmed. He looked at me.

5/9

09:41

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 275

"Where's Bella?" he asked. "Isn't she here?"

"She went out for a delivery," I replied. "She won't be back until later."

He nodded and didn't ask again. He ordered a cup of coffee milk tea and sat quietly, sipping it slowly.

I couldn't deny it. He stood out.

Even in my small restaurant, even sitting quietly, he drew attention. He was a handsome man, too handsome. His posture, his looks, the calm confidence around him – it was all too obvious. A few customers kept looking him. Even I caught myself staring.

No wonder people believe anything he touches is special.

Just as I wondered when Bella would return, another car pulled up outside. It was a Bentley.

My eyes widened in shock. I've never had such luxurious cars pull up to my restaurant.

Was he lost?

A

tall man stepped out. He wore a light grey suit. Goddess, he was gorgeous. His bangs were swept back neatly. He looked young, but there was something and dangerous about him. 6/9

09:41

– Boran

< Chapter 275

even from afar, I could feel his dominant aura. He looked a bit familiar.

Who is that...?

He walked in, and the air in the restaurant changed. His eyes were bright, cold, and strangely captivating.

I was about to approach him when he stopped beside Eric. The two men looked at each other.

The tension was immediate. The air felt thick with tension.

After a moment, the man pulled out a chair and sat down at Eric's table.

My heart raced. They know each other?

"I didn't expect to see you here," the man said, half smiling.

"Neither did I," Eric replied.

I could feel it. This wasn't a friendly meeting.

I walked over, trying to keep my composure.

"What can I get you, sir?" I asked.

"Give me what he's having," the man replied. 7/9

09:41

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 275

I brought over another coffee milk tea and set it down.

“You like coffee milk tea too?” Eric asked.

The man took a sip calmly. “We can drink the same coffee,” he said lightly, “but not have the same people.”

Eric’s expression shifted.

“People aren’t coffee,” Eric said coolly. “Coffee doesn’t make choices.”

The man’s eyes turned dark.

“Are you regretting your decision?” he asked. “Do you want to compete with me again?”

My stomach dropped.

This is bad. Very bad.

I stood there, frozen, knowing this conversation wasn’t finished.

And it wouldn’t end peacefully.

Chapter 276

THIRD PERSON’S POV

Jazz stared at Bella as if she had misheard her.

“Your... boyfriend?” Jazz repeated. Her eyes widened so much it almost hurt.

Her eyes moved to Kane.

Judging from the brief exchange she had overheard earlier, Jazz had already sensed that something was going on between Bella and this man. But sensing something and hearing it confirmed were two very different things. The confirmation hit her hard.

The man standing there didn’t look like someone who should belong to a delivery girl’s life.

Even though Kane wore a small polite smile and stood calmly beside Bella, Jazz’s instincts screamed at her. This was not a harmless man. His presence was heavy. She could feel his dominance in the air. There was something dangerous about the way he stood, the way his eyes observed everything

Why does he look so familiar...?

Her heart skipped as something in her head clicked. ha09:41

18 Bonus

< Chapter 276

Stonewood?

The thought made a shiver go down her spine. Could it be him?

Before she could process it fully, Bella spoke again.

“Yes,” Bella said clearly. “You heard me right. He is **my** boyfriend.”

Jazz swallowed hard. She forced herself to step forward and extend her hand, trying to compose herself.

“Hello,” she said. “I’m Jazz. I own this restaurant.”

Kane reached out and shook her hand. His grip was firm but not aggressive.

“Hello,” he replied calmly. “I’m Kane.”

That was all. Just one name, yet Jazz felt as if the ground beneath her feet had tilted.

Kane.

Her mind spun. This can’t be the Kane I’m thinking of... **right?**

She felt lightheaded just thinking about it.

2/8

09:41

< Chapter 276

Eric stood up and walked toward them at that moment, breaking the strange silence. His expression was controlled, but his eyes briefly changed when he glanced at Kane.

“I don’t want to go against you right now,” Eric said directly to Kane.

Then he looked at Bella.

“The film crew from my company treated you poorly yesterday,” he continued. “I came today to apologize on their behalf. If you suffered any losses, tell me. I’ll compensate you.”

Bella shook her head immediately.

“There’s no damage,” she said. “You don’t need to compensate anything. Thank you for stepping in yesterday.”

Eric studied her face for a moment, as if wanting to say something more. In the end, he only nodded.

“I see,” he said quietly. “Then I’ll be leaving.”

Before turning away, he gave Kane a deep, meaningful look. Then he walked out of the restaurant.

As the door closed behind him, Eric looked at the floor **as he** let out a quiet, bitter laugh.

3/8

09:42

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 276

I won’t go against Kane for Bella. But he would go against me for her.

That difference alone told him everything.

Bella didn’t occupy the same place in his heart as she did in

Kane’s.

What he truly wanted – what he had always wanted – was the little girl whose name he didn’t even know.

He reached inside his shirt then touched the small silver bracelet resting against his chest. It pressed against his

heartbeat, as if reminding him that she still existed somewhere in this world.

“When will I find you?” he thought to himself “I have so much to tell you. I miss you”

Inside the restaurant, Jazz slowly turned her eyes back to

Kane.

He had already returned to his seat.

He sat there calmly, sipping the rest of his coffee as if nothing unusual had happened. A German book lay open in his hand.

He looked like a man simply waiting for someone to finish work. That image alone made Jazz's chest tighten.

4/8

09:42

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 276

Unable to contain herself any longer, Jazz pulled Bella aside.

"Bella," she whispered urgently, "he... he isn't just anyone, is he?"

Bella hesitated for only a second "What do you mean?"

"Is that Alpha Stonewood?"

"Yes. He is."

The words struck Jazz like thunder. Her ears rang. Her mind went blank.

Stonewood Group. Alpha Stonewood.

Bella – the quiet delivery girl – was dating the man who ruled Byron City from the shadows.

And not only that. When Bella said she still had work to do, Kane stayed. He waited. He read a book and drank coffee in a small restaurant instead of leaving.

Jazz had been through too much in her life to misread people. From the way Kane looked at Bella, it was obvious that this

man was serious.

After Kane finished his coffee, Jazz walked over to talk to him.

5/8

09:42

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 276

“Would you like anything else, Alpha Stonewood?” she asked.

“A glass of water,” Kane replied simply.

She brought it over quickly. Just as she turned to leave, Kane spoke again.

“Wait.”

Jazz froze and turned back. “Yes?”

“Sit down,” Kane said, pointing to the chair opposite him. “There’s something I want to discuss.”

Jazz felt uneasy as soon as he said that but she sat down

anyway.

“Bella wants to earn her own living,” Kane said calmly. “I won’t stop her. She likes you and your son. She’s happy working here. That’s why I allow it. I only want her to be safe.”

Jazz’s heart trembled.

“My son and I care about Bella too,” she said quickly.

“That’s good,” Kane replied. “If you ever face trouble, I can help. But don’t take advantage of her. If you cross that line, I won’t be lenient.”

6/8

09:42

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 276

Jazz swallowed hard. Before she could speak, Kane continued.

“Ian has been looking for you for years,” he said casually. “You bribed prison staff and changed your household records. Clever.”

Jazz nearly jumped out of her chair “You... investigated me?” she asked.

“Yes,” Kane said “Bella doesn’t know. And she won’t.”

The warning was clear.

Jazz nodded “I understand. I never meant to use Bella. I hired

her because I empathized with her.”

The coldness in Kane’s eyes softened a little bit.

“I won’t interfere between you and Ian,” he said. “I only care about Bella’s safety.”

He handed Jazz his phone number. “You can call me anytime there’s a problem”

Jazz wrote it down quickly with her hands trembling. She felt relieved when she heard those words from him. He wouldn’t

expose her.

7/8

09:42

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 276

He was only protecting Bella

As Kane stood up to leave, Jazz watched him. She was in awe and was also a bit scared.

Does Bella know, she wondered, how fiercely this man is protecting her?

Chapter 277

+8 Bonus

BELLAS DOV

Later that evening, Kane stayed in the restaurant and had dinner with me,

Kane ordered dinner without asking for my opinion, but when the dishes arrived, I realized every single one of these was something I could eat comfortably. Nothing too spicy, Nothing too heavy, Nothing that would upset my stomer.

Kane didn’t ask if I was hungry. He simply assumed I would be, the way someone did when they already know you well,

Kane ate slowly. He had that calm expression on his face, like nothing could touch him.

I caught myself watching him.

Stop, I told myself. You’re staring.

But I couldn't fully look away.

When dinner ended, Kane stood up and reached for my coat without a word. He helped me put it on.

As we walked out together, I noticed the looks immediately.

< Chapter 277

+8 Bonus

My colleagues from the restaurant stood nearby, pretending to be busy while **very** obviously watching us. They moved back and forth **between** Kane and me. Their eyes **were** wide with curiosity.

"Is that her boyfriend?" someone **whispered**.

"He's ridiculously handsome."

"He looks rich."

I heard every word.

eyes

By the end of the night, everyone knew. Bella Jameson, the quiet woman who worked diligently and kept **to herself**, had a boyfriend. And not **just** any boyfriend, but an incredibly handsome one.

They didn't **know** who he really was. And I made sure they didn't.

When they asked me, I simply said, "His name is Kane."

The jokes followed soon after. Someone laughed and said I was about to climb the social ladder. Another teased that I **might** not need to work forever if I held onto him.

I **smiled** politely and let it pass. I didn't take it to heart.

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 277

I knew better.

I knew that if those same people ever learned Kane's real identity, they wouldn't be joking. They wouldn't be laughing. They might even whisper behind my back that someone like Kane would never truly stay with a woman like me. Some of them might wait eagerly for the day he left.

On our way back, I looked out the window. The silence inside the car was comfortable, not awkward. Kane rested one arm casually, looking at the road

"Your boss is a nice lady," he said suddenly.

"Yes," I replied softly. "Jazz is nice."

I paused, then frowned as something came to mind.

"By the way," I added, "Riley is having his operation tomorrow. Jazz and her mother are going to the hospital to watch over him. The restaurant will be closed for a few days, so I'll have some time off."

Kane glanced at me, lifting an eyebrow. "Does that mean I won't be able to eat the lunch you deliver tomorrow?"

I was caught off guard. For a moment, I didn't know how to answer. Then it dawned on me. I had been having lunch with him recently. We ate together almost every day.

3/9

09:51

< Chapter 277

I looked away briefly, pretending to think.

66

...I suppose not," I muttered.

+8 Bonus

I thought of how we lived together in the cabin. Back then, when work kept me late, I would prepare food in advance for him. He would heat it up and eat it alone. I remembered how happy I felt whenever I watched him eat.

"How about I cook lunch tomorrow and bring it over?" I said suddenly.

Kane turned to me "All right. You said it yourself. I'll wait for your lunch tomorrow."

Now that I had promised him, I knew I couldn't go back on my word.

"Do you have anything you want to eat?" I asked.

"I'm not a fussy eater," he shrugged "I'll enjoy anything you make."

I understood immediately. He didn't have favorites or maybe he simply didn't care.

"Then I'll cook something," I said.

4/9

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+8 Bonus

< Chapter 277

When we returned to the Stonewood Residence, we got in. I washed up and stepped out of the bathroom. I stopped when I saw Kane already sitting on the bed.

These days, we slept on the same bed. Somehow, it had become routine.

I needed the lights on to sleep. Darkness still reminded me too much of prison.

"I don't think you'll get used to sleeping with the lights on," I said gently. "Maybe you should go back to your room."

Kane looked up at me. "I want to sleep with you. The lights don't matter to me."

I froze.

I swallowed the rest of my words and turned away, pretending to tidy something that didn't need tidying. He really says things like that too easily, I thought. Does he know what it does to me?

As I walked toward the bed, my thoughts became scattered.

"Are you going to sleep?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

5/9

09.51

*0 Bonus

X Chapter 277

I lifted the quilt and lay down. Almost immediately, Kane's arms wrapped around my waist. He pulled me close without hesitation. He buried his face against my chest and breathed me in.

I was stiff at first, then slowly relaxed.

I liked this side of him....too much.

"So," I said quietly, trying to distract myself, "what did Eric say to you today? Were you arguing?"

"What of it?" Kane replied lazily.

He didn't loosen his hold. If anything, he held me closer, breathing me in even more.

"I heard him say he didn't want to be against you," I continued. "It sounded serious."

"He meant it literally," Kane said.

I frowned. "Why? Are you competing over a business deal?"

"No," he replied flatly. "We're competing for you,"

I nearly choked. My breath caught, my body stiffening in his arms.

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 277

"...What?" I asked.

Kane lifted his head and looked at me. His eyes were dark and deep, blending into the night.

"He likes you," he said. "He wants to take you away from me"

My mind went blank. That can't be right. Eric was with Kathy.

"So I told him," Kane continued calmly, "that if he dares to make a move, I'll make him my enemy. And I won't hesitate."

My heart pounded violently. "You'd really do that to Eric?"

"I told you before," Kane said quietly. "I love you. You're as important to me as my own life. Did you think I was joking?"

I bit my lip, feeling stunned.

I didn't realize how vulnerable I looked. Kane did.

His finger lifted and gently brushed my lips.

"But even if he wants to snatch you away, he can't," Kane

murmured. "Because the person you like is me. And the person you're destined to love... is me."

He leaned in then he kissed me.

7/9

09:51

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 277

The kiss was deep and intense. It wasn't rushed. It was passionate as always. I kissed him back, gripping his shirt as the kiss deepened. It left me breathless.

Kane would be the death of me. I was sure of that

When I woke the next morning, Kane was already gone.

After breakfast, I prepared lunch for us. The ingredients and lunch boxes were ready. The chef stayed nearby in case I needed help. When I finished, I looked at the lunch box and felt satisfied.

I really have improved, I thought.

I headed to the Stonewood Group. The security guards bowed their heads when I got out of the car.

"Good afternoon," I greeted.

"Good... afternoon," they replied.

I went up to Kane's floor.

"Is Alpha. Stonewood in?" I asked.

"Yes." 8/9

09:51

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 277

“Is anyone with him?”

“No.”

As soon as I heard that, I walked into his office. I knocked and entered, seeing Kane at his desk in a video conference. I froze, relieved the camera wasn't facing me.

“You're here,” he said. “Wait a bit.”

“Okay,” I whispered.

As I placed the lunch box down, a voice came from the screen.

“Oh, Kane... is that the woman we saw during the last meeting?”

Chapter 278

BELLA'S POV

I froze the moment that voice came from the screen.

My hands tightened around the lunch box without me realizing it, and my heart skipped so hard it felt like it hit my ribs. I stood there awkwardly, not knowing whether I should move, speak, or pretend I did not exist at all.

Someone else spoke again “It could be someone else.”

Another voice followed immediately “I don't think so. I've never heard Alpha Stonewood speak in such a gentle tone to any other woman.”

They started speaking in German. I understood every single word.

They're talking about me, I realized. They're talking about me while I'm standing right here.

I lowered my head slightly, wishing the floor would open up and swallow me. My chest felt tight, and my ears burned. The fact that I could understand their conversation only made

it worse. I felt like I was overhearing something I was never

meant to hear.

1/8

09:51

+ Bonus

< Chapter 278

Then Kane's calm voice cut through the noise. "It's her."

Just two words.

The discussion on the screen paused for a brief moment, then someone laughed softly. "Oh ? What's going on between you two, Alpha? Is she your woman?"

My breath stopped. I felt dizzy.

Before I could even process the question, Kane answered again, still in German.

"She's the love of my life." He told them.

My heart slammed violently against my chest.

For a split second, I forgot how to breathe. My fingers curled tightly. My body went stiff as if I had been struck by lightning. The world around me seemed to blur, and all I could hear was the sound of my own heartbeat pounding in my ears.

The love of his life...?

I stood there, stunned. My mind went blank. I didn't know how long the meeting continued after that. I barely registered the voices fading away or the screen going dark.

All I knew was that Kane had said it. Out loud. Without

2/8

< Chapter 278

hesitation.

+8 Bonus

When the video conference ended, Kane stood up and walked toward me. He looked calm, like nothing extraordinary had just happened. Meanwhile, my face felt like it was on fire.

"What's wrong?" he asked quietly. "Why are you blushing?"

I shook my head “No... it’s nothing.”

It was a lie, and we both knew it.

Kane reached out and held me before I could step back. He studied my expression closely, as if he wanted to read every thought passing through my mind.

“Is it because of what they said earlier?” he asked.

I went silent. My silence answered him better than any words could have.

“Well,” Kane said calmly, “I’ll introduce you to them when I have the chance.”

“Really?” I blurted out before I could stop myself.

He raised an eyebrow slightly. “What? You don’t want me to?”

He stared into my eyes intensely. I felt like I was being pinned

3/8

09:51

+8 Bonus

< Chapter 278

in place by his eyes alone. I swallowed and forced myself to think clearly.

“It’s not that,” I said carefully. “I just think... we only started dating recently. And they’re senior executives overseas. Isn’t it a bit too early?”

“Is it?” Kane smiled. He raised his fingers to brush my cheek. “I think it’s going a little slow.”

Then his tone softened. “But if you think it’s too fast, I’ll wait until you’re ready.”

Only then did I finally relax.

I let out a deep breath. “How about you get your hands off me first?” I said helplessly. “Or you won’t be able to eat properly.”

“I don’t want to let go,” Kane muttered, his thumb still tracing my cheek. “Your face is soft. The longer I touch it, the more addictive it gets.”

I was completely speechless. I fought the urge to close my eyes and lean more into his touch.

I didn't know whether to scold him or hide my face. In the end, I could only stand there, letting him touch me until he finally withdrew his hand on his own.

< Chapter 278

The air between us felt thick and intimate.

Only then did we finally sit down to eat.

I had prepared three simple dishes, all ordinary home-cooked meals. They looked much better than usual, thanks to the guidance I had received. Kane stared at them, looking surprised.

"You made these?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied "But your chef helped."

After taking a bite, he looked up at me. I held my breath.

"How is it?" I asked softly.

"They're good," he said.

"But not as good as your chef's, right?" I pressed.

"No," Kane replied without hesitation. "I prefer yours."

I laughed lightly, not quite believing him. "You're just sweet-talking."

Before he could respond, my phone rang. I saw Jazz's name and answered immediately.

5/8

09:52

< Chapter 278

+8 Bonus

"Bella," Jazz said excitedly, "Riley's surgery went well. The doctor said once he stabilizes, he can start training to recognize

voices."

"That's wonderful," I said with joy.

I felt relieved. I was so happy for her.

"I'll come see him this afternoon," I added before hanging up.

"Is that the child with hearing problems?" Kane asked.

"Yes. I'm planning to visit him."

"I'll go with you."

I stared at him. "You will?"

"I'll postpone my work," he said calmly. "It's not urgent."

I knew that wasn't true. Everything he handled was urgent.

"You don't want me to go?" he asked.

"No," I said quickly. "I was just surprised."

"Then it's settled."

As we ate quietly, Kane suddenly spoke again. "Can you keep 6/8

92 09:52

&

+8 Bonus

<Chapter 278

making meals for me in the future?"

I looked up, surprised, just as he wiped rice grains from the corner of my lips. My face heated instantly.

"I'm not a good cook," I said. "Your chef is better."

"So?" Kane replied. "I like what you make."

I had my doubts though. Is he just saying this to please me?

Then Kane spoke again "I like knowing you're busy because of me. When you cook for me, I know you're thinking of me. That makes me happy."

My heart raced at his words. This man....

“Would it be okay?” he asked again.

...Then I'll cook when I can,” I said quietly.

“Good,” he chuckled.

As I cleaned up, my finger touched something hot. I hissed and pulled back in pain.

“What’s the matter?” Kane asked anxiously.

Chapter 279

BELLA’S POV

“It’s nothing,” I said quickly. “It’s just my nail. I chipped it accidentally. I’ll trim it when I get back.”

I pulled my hand back. I felt embarrassed that something so small had drawn his attention. I usually kept my nails trimmed short. It was a habit from years ago but the past few days had been... different. I had been busy and too distracted. I had neglected things I normally never would.

My nails were slightly longer than usual.

Kane didn’t accept my explanation.

“Let me have a look,” he said, already reaching for my hand.

Before I could protest, he pulled my hand closer. His fingers were warm as they wrapped around mine. I felt a strange heat crawl up my arm as he lowered his head, examining my hand.

He looked at me with seriousness in his eyes that felt like a chill down my spine.

...

< Chapter 279

“Is this the one?” he asked.

He held my left index finger gently, turning it slightly.

I followed his gaze and saw what he was looking at. The edge of the nail was cracked just a little. It wasn’t bleeding. It wasn’t serious. It would have been fine with a quick trim.

“Yes,” I nodded. “That one.”

“Wait here,” Kane said.

Before I could ask what he meant, he picked up his phone and dialed his secretary.

“Do you have a nail clipper?” he asked calmly.

I nearly choked.

I turned to stare at him, my eyes wide. Did he really just ask that? My throat tightened as I struggled not to laugh or cough at the same time.

From the other end of the line, I could vaguely hear the secretary’s startled pause. She sounded just as stunned as I felt.

10:44

23

3 Bonus

< Chapter 279

“...A nail clipper?” she repeated.

“Yes,” Kane replied, unbothered. “Bring it to my office.”

He hung up as if he had just asked for a document or a report.

I stared at him in disbelief. “You didn’t have to-”

“You chipped your nail,” he said simply. “It’ll catch on things.”

I didn’t know what to say to that.

A few minutes later, there was a knock on the door. The secretary stepped in, holding a small pair of nail clippers in her hand. When she saw me sitting on the sofa beside Kane, her eyes widened slightly, but she quickly hid her surprise.

“Alpha Stonewood,” she said, handing the clippers to him. “Here they are.”

“Alright,” Kane replied as he took them. “You may leave.”

She nodded and left quietly, closing the door behind her

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 279

The room fell silent.

Kane sat beside me, holding my hand and the nail clippers too.

"I-" I started, then stopped. This is ridiculous, I thought. I could've done this myself in ten seconds.

"Don't move," he said.

He lowered his head again, focusing intently on my finger. His expression was serious, careful, like he was handling something fragile.

"Okay," I sighed. "Not too deep. But not too far out either."

He paused, clearly listening.

"A little more inward," I continued. "And don't forget the side... yeah, just like that."

He clipped slowly, carefully, as if one wrong move would hurt me. I found myself watching his face instead of my nail. He looked so...focused.

4/9

10:44

< Chapter 279

I fought the urge to laugh.

He looks like he's negotiating a deal, I thought.

"No, wait," I said quickly. "A little more there. Yes. That's good."

He adjusted his angle and clipped again.

After a while, my finger felt fine. I pulled my hand back slightly. "That's enough."

But Kane didn't stop. He looked at my other nails "These are long too."

I blinked. "They're fine."

"They'll chip again," he said.

Before I could object, he took my hand again and began trimming the rest of my nails, one by one. I stopped

guiding him after a while. I was tired, both physically and mentally. It would have been easier to do it myself, but he seemed... focused.

When he finally finished, he leaned back and looked at:44

my hand as if inspecting his work.

+3 Bonus

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“When your nails grow again,” he said,, “I’ll help you trim them.”

I was speechless.

It was still noon. There was still some time before I could

visit Riley, so Kane returned to his desk to deal with work. I sat on the sofa and took out my phone, scrolling absentmindedly.

A trending topic caught my eye.

It was about Kathy.

The headline praised her as a winner in life. She had a successful career and stable love. It mentioned that she would attend the GF dinner in Byron City with Eric. The article emphasized the importance of the guests who were all influential figures, all powerful people.

The message was clear. She hadn’t lost him.

Pictures followed. The photos showed Kathy smiling brightly, Kathy endorsing luxury brands , Kathy on magazine covers.

6/9

10:44

123 Bonus

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Anyone could tell that all of this support came from Eric. Once he let go, everything would collapse.

I

knew what he was like when he was annoyed. I had seen how cold and ruthless he could be when ex-girlfriends clung to him after the relationship ended. He hated being pestered.

I scoffed softly.

Whatever happens to her has nothing to do with me.

I had given Kathy everything back then. I had helped her. I had trusted her. And when I was imprisoned, her family had been the first to abandon me.

I continued scrolling until my eyes grew heavy.

The quiet room, the sound of Kane typing, the peace I felt – it all made me drowsy. I leaned back against the sofa and closed my eyes.

When I opened them again, I was staring at the ceiling.

I jolted upright instantly. I fell asleep?

7/9

10:44

“You’re awake,” Kane said. “Do you want to sleep a little

43 Bonus

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longer?”

I turned and looked at him, startled. “I – I fell asleep. Why didn’t you wake me?”

“You were sleeping well,” he replied. “I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“But I said I was going to visit Riley,” I said anxiously, checking the time. It was just past three.

“There’s still time,” Kane said as he stood and put on his coat. “I’ll drive you.”

I nodded quickly. As I stood, I grabbed my hairband and tied my hair into a ponytail in a few swift motions. Kane watched me closely.

“Do you always fix your hair that fast?” he asked.

“Not really,” I said lightly. “I used to take forever. But when I was in prison—”

I stopped short. The air changed.

I’m sorry,” Kane said quietly.

10:44

(**) +3 Bonus

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“No,” I said quickly. “It’s not your fault. Prison wasn’t all bad. It showed me who was real and who wasn’t.”

Otherwise, I might still be fooling myself.

Kane’s expression got a bit darl. “Aren’t you afraid I might be wearing a mask too?”

I stared at him, then laughed softly. “I have nothing to lose. If you were pretending, you’d have a reason. And I don’t think you do.”

He smiled then took my hand. “Let’s go.”

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BELLA’S POV

23. Bouna

Kane parked the car in the hospital lot, and for a brief moment, neither of us moved.

The hospital stood quietly under the evening lights but my heart still tightened the moment I saw it. No matter how many times I walked into a hospital now, it never felt the same as before. It was no longer just a workplace in my memory. It had become a place where hope and fear sat side by side.

I took a slow breath and pushed the door open.

“Ready?” Kane asked softly as he stepped out beside me.

“Yes,” I replied, nodding. I have to be.

We walked into the building together. The corridors were clean and quiet. When we reached Riley’s ward, I paused at the door for half a second before pushing it open gently.

The ward was better than I had imagined.

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It was a single room. The place was spacious and bright. The curtains were half-drawn. Medical equipment stood neatly by the bed.

Riley was asleep.

His small body lay quietly under the blanket. His face looked peaceful. My chest loosened the moment I saw him like that.

Thank goodness... he's resting.

I walked over quietly and placed the toys I had bought for him on the bedside table. I arranged them carefully, making sure they were the first things he would see when he opened his eyes.

He'll smile when he sees them, I thought. I hope he smiles.

Jazz and her mother were already in the room.

When Jazz saw Kane and me enter together, she froze for a brief moment. She looked surprised but she hid it quickly.

2/9

10:44

"Bella," she greeted, then nodded politely at Kane. "Hello

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sir"

"Jazz," I replied softly. "How's Riley?"

"He just fell asleep not long ago," she said. "The doctor said he needs good rest."

"That's good," I said. I was genuinely relieved.

I glanced at the bedside table again, then suddenly remembered something.

"Oh," I said, frowning slightly. "I forgot to buy fruits."

Jazz looked at me in confusion.

"I remember Riley saying he wanted to eat pomegranates while he's in the hospital," I continued as I pulled out my phone, already searching. "I should get some."

"No need, Bella," Jazz said quickly. "You already bought toys for him. I'll get fruits later. Thank you so much"

"It's fine," I insisted gently. "I saw a fruit stand at the entrance earlier. I'll be quick."

3/9

Jazz hesitated. "Bella-"

10:44

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"I promised Riley," I said, smiling "I'll be right back."

Before she could stop me, I turned and left the ward.

JAZZ'S POV

After Bella left the ward, the room suddenly felt much quieter.

It was just me, my mother, and Kane. I could feel the pressure immediately.

Even though I already knew who Kane really was, being in the same space with him made my back tense unconsciously. He didn't need to speak loudly or show authority. His presence alone was enough to make people cautious.

My mother sat stiffly beside Riley's bed, her hands clenched together. I could tell she was extremely uncomfortable. She kept her eyes on Riley, pretending not to notice Kane at all.

I took a breath and forced myself to speak first.

"Alpha Stonewood," I said, trying to sound calm "would44

10:44

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you like some tea?"

"No, thanks," he replied. His eyes moved to Riley. "So, he's Ian's son, right?"

My heart skipped. I felt my mother jolt beside me. She almost stood up in shock.

I looked at Kane directly. "Is that something you found out from investigating my background?"

"Yes," he answered. "It's an inference based on timing."

He paused briefly, then continued, "What's interesting is that Ian doesn't seem to know he has a son."

Damn it.

"Riley is my son alone," I said slowly. "From the beginning, Ian never wanted him. He has nothing to do with my child."

Before I could say more, my mother panicked.

She stood up abruptly and rushed toward Kane. "Alpha. Stonewood, please... please don't tell anyone about Riley."

10:44

+3 Bonus

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She was so flustered that she nearly knelt. She was even about to.

"Mom!" I rushed forward and stopped her. Fear gripped my chest. I was terrified that her desperation would offend Kane.

Kane didn't move. He didn't look angry either.

"I said before," he spoke calmly, "I'm not interested in matters between you and Ian."

Then he looked at Riley again.

"But Bella," he added, "seems to like the kid." He paused slightly. "He's lucky. That earns him a favor."

I understood immediately. Everything suddenly made sense.

The specialist who appeared out of nowhere. The discounted medical bills. The smooth rehabilitation arrangements. I had thought we were unbelievably lucky.

But luck like that didn't exist. It wasn't heaven. It was

Bella.

Ja. Bella must have asked Kane for help and Kane had

10:44

(58) 13 Bonus

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agreed.

My throat burned.

BELLA'S POV

I returned to the ward carrying a bag of fresh pomegranates. The moment I stepped inside, I smiled brightly.

"I'm back," I said cheerfully. "When Riley wakes up, if the doctor allows it, he can eat these."

I placed the bag carefully on the table.

"Thank you, Bella," Jazz said.

I froze slightly. "It's just pomegranates."

I assumed she was overwhelmed from worry.

"Don't worry about it, Jazz. Riley's surgery was successful," I said gently. "He just needs time to adapt. He's safe now."

Jazz nodded slowly. "Yes... everything will be fine" 10:44

+3 Bonus

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She didn't say more, but she kept looking at me in a way she hadn't before.

Why is she looking at me like that? I wondered.

When it was time to leave, Riley was still asleep.

"I'll visit again," I said softly as I waved goodbye.

I hugged her tightly and I hugged Mrs Sinclair too. Mrs Sinclair hugged me back and thanked me.

Jazz and Mrs. Sinclair thanked me again and again.

As Kane and I walked out, my chest felt strangely warm and heavy at the same time.

W

I'm glad he's okay, I thought. That's all that matters.

JAZZ'S POV

After Bella finally left the ward with Kane, I finally sat down. The room was quiet again.

My mother turned to me slowly.

8/9

10:45

“Jazz,” she whispered, “who... who is Bella really?”

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I stared at the door Bella had walked out of. I didn't answer right away.

Who was Bella? A former convict. A gentle woman. A helper in a small restaurant.

And yet... she was someone who could move Kane

Stonewood to act without hesitation.

“I don't know,” I said honestly at last. “But she's not an ordinary person.”

And for the first time, I realized something clearly.

Bella had never been the one who needed saving.

She had been saving others all along.