

Through Rising Fog We Walk Paths Unknown Yet Comforting

Chapter 281

BELLA'S POV

Kane and I walked to the hospital parking lot.

I reached for the door handle. Just as I leaned forward, Kane pushed me till my back pressed against the car door. His body heat surrounded me instantly, and my heart jumped so hard it felt like it hit my ribs.

"Kane?" I murmured, looking into his eyes.

He looked down at me with those dark eyes of his.

"Smile at me," he said.

"What?" I was genuinely confused. "Why... why are you saying that all of a sudden?"

"Smile at me," he repeated. His voice was lower this time. "Just like you did in the ward."

Most of the smiles I gave him were careful ones. I knew **that**. After everything I had been through, I rarely smiled without thinking. I had learned to guard my expressions 4

But earlier, in the ward, while looking at Riley, I had smiled without thinking. That was a real smile.

Apparently, Kane had noticed.

"Don't I usually smile at you?" I asked quietly, trying to sound calm. "Why do you want me to smile so suddenly?"

"Because that smile was beautiful," he replied. "I want to see it again."

My breath hitched. Then he leaned a little closer.

"Will you smile one more time, Sis?" he asked. His tone was gentle.

My face heated up instantly.

"There's... there's a surveillance camera here," I stuttered, glancing toward the corner of the parking lot. "Someone might be watching."

“So what?” Kane replied calmly.

His eyes burned with something intense. I saw so many emotions in his eyes – Desire. Longing. Possession. It all

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mixed together, making it hard for me to breathe properly.

“Smile one more time,” he said again, slower now. “I want to see your smile one more time.”

My heart began to pound wildly.

I looked into his eyes and felt my heart melt. The way he was looking at me made me want to give him anything he asked for. It was dangerous. It was foolish. And yet, I couldn't stop myself.

Why am I like this with him? I thought. Why do I lose control so easily?

I took a small breath, then another. And then I smiled.

It wasn't the polite smile I gave strangers. Not the restrained one I used at work. This smile came from my heart. I felt it reach my eyes, felt my face warm as the smile spread.

For a moment, he simply stared at me, as if he had forgotten how to breathe.

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That smile must have been truly **dazzling**, because even I

felt lighter as I held it.

After leaving the hospital, I didn't expect Kane to actually take me to the food street.

At first, we were only passing by. I had mentioned casually, out of pure nostalgia, that I hadn't been there in a long time. I didn't think he would take it seriously.

Yet Kane parked the car nearby without hesitation and got out.

“We're really going?” I asked in surprise.

“Is there something wrong?” he looked at me.

“You... you're sure?” I hesitated. “Didn't you say you hated crowded places?”

“I went with you to a night market before,” he replied calmly. “It’s the same thing.”

“But back then,” I said slowly, “I didn’t know who you really were.”

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If I had known he was Kane, I would never have dragged him to a cheap night market to buy clothes.

“What’s the difference?” Kane looked at me again “Past or future, I’m still the Kane you knew.”

That simple sentence hit me harder than I expected. Whenever he looked at me like that, I found it impossible to argue.

“...Then let’s take a stroll,” I said softly.

I followed him into the food street.

The place was crowded, lively, full of voices and laughter. The smell of grilled meat, fried snacks, and sweet desserts filled the air. People walked past us constantly. Students laughed in groups, couples held hands, vendors shouted their prices.

For a moment, I felt like I had stepped back into my old life.

Back when I was in college, I used to come here often with my classmates. We would eat cheap snacks, complain about exams, and **laugh** until our stomachs

hurt. After I started working I stopped coming. Then

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prison happened. After I was released, I still survive.

Strolling like this had become a luxury I didn’t dare to think about.

Kane and I bought skewers, snacks, and drinks. We ate as we walked. He didn’t seem bothered by the surroundings at all. Instead, he moved through the crowd easily. He would shield me when people pushed past.

I noticed something else too. Young women kept looking at him. This happened again and again.

Some tried to look discreet. Some didn’t bother hiding it

at all.

I understood why.

Kane was incredibly gorgeous. Tonight, Kane's hair was combed back, revealing his forehead. Without his bangs covering his eyes, his handsome features were fully exposed. He looked even more striking than before. He drew attention effortlessly.

When we passed a hair accessory stall, I stopped

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"I need to buy some hairbands," I said.

The ones I used were cheap and worn out. The elastic was already loose. Normally, I bought them online in bundles but seeing them here reminded me I needed new ones.

Kane glanced at my hair, then leaned closer. He noticed the white rubber inside my black hairband peeking through.

I squatted down and picked the cheapest pack. Then, I started to bargain with the stall owner.

Before I could finish my sentence, Kane grabbed my arm and pulled me up.

"Hey," I protested. "I'm not done bargaining yet."

"I'll buy it for you," he said.

"I" I started, but he stopped walking abruptly and turned to face me.

"Bella," he said quietly, "is it really that hard for you to accept something from me?"

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My breath caught. He looked annoyed, like really N
annoyed.

"You said you want to be independent," he continued. "You want to work and not rely on me. Fine. There's nothing wrong with that."

He paused, taking a breath.

"But even a normal boyfriend buys his girlfriend small things. Do you even treat me as your boyfriend?"

I couldn't answer. I felt bad. Kane never got hurt like this.

“Not wanting to rely on me doesn’t mean rejecting everything I give you,” he said. “I want to give you a good life.”

I finally nodded. “Okay,” I said softly. “Then please buy me some hair ties.”

I knew I was too guarded. I was just too afraid of repeating past mistakes. Too afraid of becoming dependent again.

But we were together now. Pushing him away over small things would only hurt him.

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Kane took me into a shop nearby. When we got in the prices shocked me. A simple black hair tie cost fifty dollars.

“We’ll take this,” Kane said calmly. “Ten of them.”

“Ten?” I blurted out.

“You wanted ten earlier,” he replied.

I had no words. He then picked more accessories. The prices on these accessories shook me to my core.

“These are too expensive,” I said hesitantly. “I don’t even get to wear them often.”

“Then I’ll create opportunities for you to wear them,” he said. “As for the price, worry about it when it’s half my wealth.”

He turned to the assistant. “Pack them.”

The assistant beamed. Her smile got wider as she packed everything.

He

paid and took the bag.

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“Let’s buy clothes and shoes,” he added.

“But I already have-”

“I want to see you dressed beautifully,” he said. “You’re my girlfriend.”

I hesitated, then sighed. “Can I choose?”

“Of course.”

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BELLA'S POV

As we strolled through the mall, my steps slowed without me realizing it.

The place was bright, clean, and filled with soft music. The smell of perfume and new fabric filled the air.

I stopped in front of a clothing store without thinking too much about it.

“These look... simple,” I said, half to myself.

“Go try them,” Kane replied.

We walked in. I took my time looking at the clothes. They were all beautiful. I stopped and took a beige long dress and a pair of matching sandals into the changing room.

When I put them on and stepped out, I froze in front of the mirror.

The dress flowed softly around my body. It fit me

perfectly. The sandals matched the tone perfect I 09:15

used to dream about when

I was younger. It had been a very long time since I dressed like this. A very long time since I allowed myself to look at my reflection without feeling bitterness.

I stared at myself, dazed. Is that... me?

For a moment, I felt like I was looking at my old self. The girl who once walked through hospital corridors in a white coat. The girl who still believed in tomorrow.

But something was different.

Back then, I was confident and proud. I was almost arrogant without realizing it.

Then prison happened.

I had been thrown into darkness, left in damp corners where my hope rusted away little by little. When I first came out, my eyes were empty, I felt lifeless. I moved like a shell.

Now, when I looked at my reflection, that dullness was gone. I looked happier. My eyes sparkled and seemed brighter.

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Is it because of Kane? I wondered.

Is it because he gave me something I thought I'd lost forever... a future?

If someone had said this to me in the past, I would have laughed bitterly. The man who once destroyed my life becoming the one who rebuilt it? It sounded absurd.

Yet here I was.

"Do you like it?" His voice sounded close.

I startled and realized Kane had walked up behind me. He stood just a step away. His tall figure reflected clearly in the mirror. Our eyes met through the glass.

"Um... n—not bad," I replied honestly.

The corner of his eyes lit up. That subtle change was enough to make my cheeks warm.

"I think it's nice too," he said.

He leaned closer till his lips were against my ear. He whispered. The warmth of his breath sent a shiver do! 5

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My ears burned.

"I—I'll take this," I said quickly. "Let me change."

I turned toward the changing room, wanting to escape the heat rising in my chest.

Suddenly, he caught my wrist. I stopped.

"What's wrong?" I asked softly.

He pressed his lips together. He looked like he was clearly restraining himself. For a brief second, his grip tightened, then loosened.

"Nothing," he said, forcing a small smile. "Go get changed."

He let go.

When I closed the changing room door behind me, I leaned against it and took a deep breath.

Calm down, Bella, I told myself. You're acting like a girl:15

My ears burned.

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He let go.

When I closed the changing room door behind me, I leaned against it and took a deep breath.

Calm down, Bella, I told myself. You're acting like a girl 15

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who's never been loved.

After that, I tried on more clothes. I tried on dresses, nice simple tops and some comfortable shoes.

Each time, I stepped out to show him. He rated them seriously.

"This one suits you."

"Too dull."

"This color looks good on you."

"Turn around."

I was actually having fun. I did some funny poses for him. I laughed more than I had in a long time.

So this is what normal couples do, I thought. So this is what I missed.

When I finally changed back into my original clothes, I came out and noticed Kane standing quietly. His eyes were on the ground. He looked lost in thoughts.

What is it?" I asked. "**What** are **you** thinking about?"

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He looked up and smiled. "Nothing."

He took the shopping bags from my hands and went to pay.

As we waited for the elevator, a young girl suddenly ran up and stopped in front of Kane.

"Hi," she said brightly. "My name is Jemma. I'm a sophomore"

He looked at her with a confused expression "Do I know you?"

She flipped her hair "No but I noticed you for a while now. Can we exchange numbers?"

She was young and pretty. Her hair was smooth. Her make up was flawless. The clothes she wore were clearly designer brands. She looked confident, someone who had grown up surrounded by praise.

Kane didn't even look at her properly.

"No," he said coldly.

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Jemma froze. She looked hurt, like the type of girl who wasn't used to rejection.

"Is it because of her?" She pointed at me. "Is she your girlfriend?"

Kane narrowed his eyes.

The anger in his eyes made the air turn cold. His eyes went dark.

Jemma shivered, yet her interest only deepened. She looked me up and down with disgust.

She sneered slightly. "Even if she's your girlfriend, you can still date me. I'll be a great girlfriend."

Her friend came up behind her then added, "Jemma is the prettiest girl on campus. Lots of men chase her."

They were implying he should be grateful.

I didn't say a word. I simply looked at her calmly.

Then Kane spoke. "You sound pathetic"

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The single word cut through the air hard..

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Jemma's face flushed.

Kane grabbed my hand and pulled me into the elevator. As the doors closed, he glanced back at her once. That icy stare rooted her to the spot.

Inside the elevator, my heart was still pounding.

He didn't hesitate, I thought. Not even for a second.

We walked to the car. From the backseat, I leaned against Kane, unaware of the car tailing us.

Kane's hand rested over mine.

"You okay?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," I replied.

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JEMMA'S POV

My eyes widened in disbelief. I had never heard anyone speak to me like that before. No man had ever rejected me before.

What the hell? I was the prettiest girl on campus. The lady standing next to him wasn't even half as beautiful as me.

What the hell is his problem?

"You sound pathetic" he said

The word echoed in my head. They felt humiliating, like a slap across my face. For a moment, I just stood there, looking at him in shock.

My mind went completely blank. I stood there with my mouth slightly open, my throat tight. I felt heat rush to my face, spreading fast, burning my cheeks and ears. Embarrassment gripped me so suddenly that I could barely breathe.

“You...” I started, but no words came out.

Before I could recover, the man had already reached out,

grabbed that woman’s hand, and pulled her straight into the elevator with him. His movements were cold, as if my existence meant nothing at all.

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I wanted to follow them. I couldn’t believe he would say those words to me. Any man would feel honoured that I even looked in their direction, talk more of coming up to talk to him. Every other man would have considered this their lucky day.

My body leaned forward. I felt my foot lifting off the ground.

Then he looked back. He gave me just one glance.

His eyes were icy and dark. He didn’t say anything but his eyes were filled with a warning so clear that my blood seemed to freeze. My heart skipped violently, and fear crawled up my spine. My legs refused to move. It felt like my feet had been nailed to the floor.

I couldn’t follow. I couldn’t even breathe properly.

The elevator doors slid shut in front of me, cutting them off from my sight.

Only then did the noise rush back into my ears.

My friend Ashley finally broke the silence, unable to hold her tongue any longer.

“That man has terrible taste,” she scoffed. “Does he even know how to speak properly?”

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Her words didn’t comfort me. They made it worse.

I clenched my fists tightly. I felt my nails digging into my palms. I had never been mocked like this before. Never. Since I was young, people had always treated me with respect. Boys chased after me. Girls envied me. Teachers favored me. Wherever I went, I was admired.

No one had ever told me that I was pathetic. Especially not a man.

My chest burned with humiliation and anger.

Who does he think he is? I thought bitterly. How dare he speak to me like that?

Then I saw the elevator number drop quickly.

First floor.

"They're leaving," I said sharply.

Without waiting, I grabbed Ashley's wrist and dragged her toward the other elevator. "Come on."

We rode down in tense silence. The moment the doors opened, I rushed out. My eyes scanned the area frantically. I spotted them almost immediately. The man was walking ahead confidently, the woman beside him. Her hand was still firmly

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held in his.

That scene stabbed straight into my pride. I gritted my teeth.

"I'll drive the car over," I said quickly. "You keep an eye on them."

"Oh... okay," Ashley replied, nodding quickly.

Ashley was my friend, yes, but everyone knew the truth. She was from the Waters family. I was a Winter.

The Winter family was far wealthier than the Waters family. When it came down to it, Ashley always followed my lead. She never dared to go against me. My family would bury hers in a second. We were much more powerful.

I turned and hurried toward my car. As I slid into the driver's seat and started the engine, my thoughts raced wildly.

That woman thinks she's won, I thought coldly. She won't be smiling for long.

I drove out of the parking area, my grip tight on the steering wheel. I didn't care where they were going. I just needed to know who that man really was.

Once I had his identity, everything else would be easy. I would tear that woman away from him. I would make him regret 4/7

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those words. I would make him beg for me.

I smirked to myself. No man had ever given me a hard time before but I didn't mind a challenge. It would make the thrill even more fun. When I finally had him, I'd make him eat his words.

My phone rang suddenly. It was Ashley.

"Where are you?" I asked impatiently.

"I see them," Ashley said quickly. "I'll send you the location."

I turned the car around and drove toward her. When I pulled up, Ashley jumped into the passenger seat, breathing slightly hard.

"It's that Bentley in front," she said, pointing ahead. "They got into that car."

I followed her gaze. My breath hitched.

The Bentley wasn't far away. It stopped at a red light. The sleek body reflected the streetlights. The car was luxurious.

My heart sank slightly.

"That car?" I asked slowly. "You didn't get it wrong, did you?"

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I stared at the license plate carefully, reading it twice to make sure my eyes weren't deceiving me.

"It's that one," Ashley said firmly. "Both of them got into it. I saw it clearly."

I had seen plenty of luxury cars before. My family owned several. But that wasn't just any luxury car. That was a limited edition Bentley. One that cost several million. It wasn't something an ordinary man could casually own.

I looked back toward where the woman had been sitting earlier in the mall.

She doesn't look like someone who owns a car like that, I thought. Not at all.

So that meant only one thing. The man owned it.

My fingers tightened around the steering wheel.

Interesting, I thought to myself Very interesting.

The light turned green.

The Bentley moved forward smoothly, and I followed at a careful distance, making sure not to attract attention. My heart pounded, not from fear, but from excitement mixed with

anger.

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Who are you really? I wondered. And who does that woman think she is, standing beside you?

No matter what, I was going to find out.

This wasn't over.

Not by a long shot.

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THIRD PERSON'S POV

The Bentley moved smoothly through the night streets of Byron City. Kane's expression remained calm, but his eyes moved to the rearview mirror. He had noticed it a while ago. There was a white BMW following them.

He slowed slightly at the traffic light. The BMW slowed too.

Kane's fingers tightened on the steering wheel. He was certain now. They were being followed.

But by who?

He reached for his phone and dialed a number he knew by heart.

"Someone's tailing my car," he said quietly once the call connected. His voice was calm and cold. "White BMW. Plate number-"

Bella turned toward him. Her heart skipped.

"Tailing us?" she asked in shock "You mean..... someone is following us?"

sure of it," Kane replied. "They've been behind y
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left the mall"

Bella's mind raced. Who would follow us? Why would anyone do that? She started feeling a bit uneasy.

"So you just... called someone?" she asked.

"Yes," Kane said simply. "The head of the traffic police. department."

Bella froze.

She stared at him as if she had misheard. The head of the traffic police? Her throat went dry . For a moment, she couldn't form a single word.

The light turned green.

Kane drove forward as if nothing unusual had happened.

Bella forced herself to look into the rearview mirror. At first, she doubted her own eyes. There were several cars between them, moving in a steady line. But then she noticed it. The same white BMW. It followed them every turn and every slowdown.

He's right, she thought. We really are being followed.

Before she could say anything else, flashing red and blue lights 2/10

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suddenly appeared from the side street. A police car cut in then signaled for the white BMW to pull over.

Bella gasped softly.

She watched as the BMW was forced to the roadside. Two uniformed officers stepped out of the police car.

The Bentley continued forward. Bella could no longer see what happened next.

She slowly turned her head to Kane.

So fast, she thought. This happened in minutes.

In that moment, she understood something clearly for the first time.

Kane's influence in Byron City wasn't something ordinary people could imagine.

The police stopped Jemma's car. Jemma clenched her teeth as she reached for her identity card and driver's license. Her movements were stiff. Her chest was tight with frustration.

Why me? she thought angrily. I didn't break any rules.

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She had checked her speed. She had obeyed every signal. Yet she was the one pulled over.

The Bentley was already gone. That fact alone made her irritated.

“What did I do wrong?” she asked.

The officer looked at her impassively. “Routine inspection.”

Jemma’s fingers shook a bit as she handed over her documents. Her pride burned quietly inside her. This is humiliating, she thought. Absolutely humiliating.

Ashley sat beside her.

While the officers checked their system, Jemma’s mind spun quickly. It doesn’t matter, she reassured herself. I already got what I needed.

Earlier, she had ordered Ashley to take a photo of the Bentley’s license plate.

Once I find out who owns that car, she thought coldly, everything will be clear.

After what felt like forever, the officers finally returned her documents and waved them off. Jemma drove away.

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The moment she stopped the **car**, she pulled out her phone and dialed her cousin.

“Help me check a license plate,” she said quickly. “I need the owner’s identity.”

Her cousin was well-connected. Normally, this kind of thing took minutes.

She waited. Five minutes passed, then her phone rang again.

Her cousin’s voice sounded strained.

“Jemma,” he said urgently, “who are you trying to investigate?”

Jemma frowned. “Why? Is there a problem?”

She truly didn't understand. It's just a car, she thought.

"There's a huge problem," her cousin said "That license plate is marked top secret."

Jemma's breath hitched. What?

"What does that mean?" she asked slowly.

"It means," he continued, lowering his voice, "that only certain officials are allowed to access that information. No civilian. No connections."

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Jemma's face drained of color.

"How did you offend someone like that?" her cousin demanded.

She didn't answer. She stared ahead at the empty road, the place where the Bentley had disappeared long ago.

Who was that man? she wondered.

BELLA'S POV

When we returned to Stonewood Residence, the house felt unusually quiet.

Kane's phone rang again.

He stepped aside to take the call. I watched him silently, studying his expression. He looked calm, but I could tell he was listening carefully.

After the call ended, he turned to me.

"The car that followed us," he said evenly, "belongs to the woman we met at the mall. The one who tried to hit on me."

My eyes widened. I was shocked.

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“Her?” I blurted out. “Why would she-”

I stopped mid-sentence. The answer came to me instantly.

It was because of him.

I remembered a girl I once knew in school. She had liked a bus driver so much that she rode his bus every day and followed him after his shift just to see where he lived. At the time, it had seemed romantic. Now, thinking about it again, it felt unsettling.

“That’s... creepy,” I murmured.

“If they try it again,” Kane said coldly, “I won’t be lenient.”

Then he looked directly at me. “What about you? What did you think about today?”

I blinked, caught off guard.

I thought carefully before answering.

“I think..... it’s normal,” I said slowly. “That girls would have a crush on you.”

It was the truth. With his looks alone, women would flock to him. Even without his status, he stood out effortlessly. Kane was gorgeous. 7/18orgeous.

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But the moment I finished speaking, I saw something in his eyes.

Disappointment.

“Don’t you feel jealous?” he asked.

“Jealous?” I was stunned that he would ask that.

He stared at me as if he was searching for something hidden deep inside me. After a moment, he sighed quietly.

“I would’ve been happy if you said you were,” he said.

I bit my lower lip.

Earlier, when that woman approached him so confidently, I hadn't felt jealousy. I had felt certainty. I knew Kane wouldn't accept her. I trusted him.

"Bella," he murmured, leaning closer, "when will you be jealous? Let me see that you care."

He looked so disappointed that it hurt me. Is this unfair? I wondered silently. He gets jealous. He worries. And I... don't?

But maybe love was never balanced. Maybe one always loved deeper.

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I didn't answer. I didn't know how.

If one day I felt jealous... would that mean I no longer trusted him?

Kane arranged a health checkup for me the next day. That night, I went to bed early.

In the morning, I found him waiting with clothes and shoes in his hands.

"Wear these," he said. "I had them washed."

I stared at the outfit. It was one of the outfits he got for me yesterday. It was a nice set of leisurewear. It was simple and lovely. Even the shoes were slip-ons.

He had thought about it. This wasn't random. He got these for me because he knew I'd like something comfortable to wear to the hospital.

I changed quietly in the bathroom. When I came out, Kane was staring at me.

"What?" I asked. "Is something wrong?"

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"No," he said softly. "It's just... rare to see you like this."

I looked down. "I dressed like this in university."

Back then, I had dressed for comfort. Later, I dressed for work.

Then for Damien.

I realized something painful.

I hadn't dressed for myself in a long time.

"I wish I had known you earlier," Kane said quietly.

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BELLA'S POV

I felt Kane's eyes on me for a long moment. His eyes didn't look cold but they were heavy, as if it carried thoughts he couldn't say out loud.

Sometimes, when he looked at me like that, I felt as though he could see straight through my skin.

"Alright," he said finally. "Let's go."

He reached out and took my hand. I followed him downstairs quietly.

Because I was going for a health checkup, I had to skip

breakfast. My stomach felt a little empty, but I didn't mind. Compared to the hunger I had experienced before, this was nothing. Still, Kane noticed.

"You'll eat right after," he said without turning around.

I blinked. "I didn't say anything."

"You didn't have to."

That was how he was. He was always so observant and calm. He noticed things others ignored.

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Outside, Kane led me toward the car. As he opened the door for me, he looked at my hair. I realized then that I was using the hairband he had bought for me the day before.

It was a simple black one. Nothing fancy.

But it was lovely and firm. It didn't stretch or loosen. It didn't have white rubber showing through like the one I had used for months. That old one had been cheap.

"That looks good," Kane said as he closed the door for me. "Later, I'll get someone to buy a few other brands for you. You can try them and compare."

I turned toward him. "There's no need for that. The ones we bought yesterday can last me a long time."

I meant it. I was used to making things last. I always calculated how long something could be used before it needed replacing.

Kane paused for a moment, then looked at me.

"Consider it me trying to spoil you a bit," he said. "Can't I?"

He started the car, then added casually, "It's normal for a boyfriend to buy things for his girlfriend, isn't it?"

My heart skipped.

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The words shook something deep inside me. A warm feeling spread through my chest. I couldn't help but blush.

I looked out the window quickly, afraid he might notice the change in my expression.

Nobody had ever said that to me before. Not even Damien.

Damien had bought me branded bags, dresses, and shoes. He got me expensive things. But he never said he was spoiling me. He never said it was because I was his girlfriend. Back then, I had mistaken those purchases for affection. Now, when I thought about it clearly, I realized he only wanted me to look presentable beside him.

Although I always told myself to be strong and independent, there was a small part of me that still wished to be cherished and taken care of, even just once in a while. Not because I needed it, but because it felt... comforting.

The car moved to the road as Kane drove.

Music played softly in the background. It was an old song. I didn't recognize it, but it felt calming.

“What is this?” I asked.

“Something I listen to when I drive,” he replied.

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“It’s calm,” I said with a smile.

He hummed “You don’t like noise.”

I smiled a little. “I like quiet things.”

“I know.”

That simple answer made my chest feel tight.

I turned my head slightly and watched him drive. His posture was relaxed. One hand rested on the steering wheel while the other adjusted the speed with ease.

Even his side view was perfect. The sight of him made me giggle a bit.

“You’re very serious when you drive,” I said.

“Driving is not a joke,” he replied.

I laughed softly. “You sound old.”

He glanced at me again, this time with a teasing smile. “I am.”

I blinked. “You’re not that old.”

“Old enough to know better.”

4/10

11:22

14 Bonus

< Chapter 285

I leaned back against the seat and watched the road ahead. For a moment, I forgot about the hospital. Forgot about checkups. Forgot about my past.

I felt... normal.

"What were you like before?" I asked suddenly, then hesitated. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

Kane was quiet for a few seconds.

"I didn't laugh much," he said finally.

I turned to him again. "And now?"

"Now, I laugh more than I used to."

I didn't miss the meaning behind his words. My heart beat a little faster.

His words made warmth spread through me in a way I didn't expect. I liked it. I liked being the reason for it.

I reached out and adjusted the volume of the music. I turned it up because I liked it.

This feels too peaceful, I thought. Like something borrowed.

5/10

11:22

+14 Bonus

< Chapter 285

I didn't want to name the feeling. I was afraid that if I did, it would disappear.

"You tie your hair up pretty fast" he said.

I laughed "Prison taught me to be quick"

He didn't laugh at that. But later, when I joked about my terrible singing voice, he actually chuckled.

I turned to look at him in surprise.

"You do laugh" I said.

"Sometimes," he replied "And lately, it's because of you"

I smiled. I didn't realize how much I enjoyed that sound until that moment.

When we arrived at the hospital, Kane told me to wait in the car. He got out first and came a round to open my door.

I stepped out, and he led me inside.

He had booked a VIP health screening package. There was no queue. No waiting. We were guided straight into the VIP section.

11:22

A person in charge was already waiting. She bowed her head at 6/10

< Chapter 285

1. us.

+14 Bonus

“All arrangements have been made, Alpha,” she said politely.

Kane nodded. “She’ll follow the nurse.”

I followed the nurse through the corridors. We did the usual

–

– blood tests. X-rays. Ultrasound scans. Everything was done smoothly and quickly.

While moving between departments, I noticed long queues outside several rooms. People waited patiently.

“These are employees from different organizations,” the nurse explained. “They came together for checkups.”

Just as we approached the ultrasound area, I noticed something strange. There was no queue outside the room the nurse led me to.

Before I could ask, a familiar voice called out.

“Bella!”

I froze. I turned around slowly.

Julia West stood in one of the queues. She was dressed neatly as usual in a fitted dress with heels. Her hair was perfectly styled. Behind her were several familiar faces from the hospital 7710

11:22

+14 Bonus

< Chapter 285

I used to work at.

Julia said something to the person beside her and stepped out of the queue, walking toward me with a surprised smile.

“I didn’t expect to see you here,” she said. “Are you delivering food?”

“No,” I replied calmly. “I’m here for a checkup.”

“A checkup?” She looked me up and down.

Today, I wasn’t dressed like I used to be when I worked delivery jobs. The clothes Kane bought fit me well. They were comfortable and they looked expensive too.

She sighed softly, pretending to be concerned. “You haven’t done a proper health check since you came out of jail. You really should.”

I almost rolled my eyes.

Then she added, “The queue is quite long today. I thought of letting you cut in with me, but that wouldn’t be fair to others. I’m sorry.”

I almost laughed. If she was truly sorry, she wouldn’t have mentioned prison at all.

8/10

11:22

14 **Bong**

< Chapter 285

“There’s no need to feel sorry,” I said evenly. “I don’t plan on cutting queues.”

Before Julia could say anything else, the nurse beside me spoke.

“Ms. Jameson,” she said clearly, “please follow me to the ultrasound room. The doctor is waiting.”

“Okay,” I replied.

I turned and followed the nurse through the door with no queue outside.

Behind me, Julia stood frozen.

Chapter 286

JULIA’S POV

What just happened?

I stood frozen in place, staring at the direction where Bella had disappeared. The nurse had led her straight into the ultrasound room – the one with no queue outside. The same room the staff had clearly told me earlier was not open to regular patients.

That's impossible, I thought. I asked about that room myself.

Earlier, when I noticed that door had no line, I had casually asked one of the hospital staff about it. The reply was very clear. That room was not for ordinary patients. Only certain people were allowed inside.

Then why was Bella there? Why was a nurse personally guiding her in?

My chest felt tight.

I turned slowly and returned to my place in the queue. My steps were heavy, and my face felt stiff. I knew my expression must have looked terrible, but I couldn't control it..

One of my colleagues standing nearby leaned closer at 11:22

whispered, "Julia, was that the senior who used to work in our hospital? The one who was sentenced to prison?"

"Yes," I replied flatly.

"She's here for a check-up too?" the colleague continued, clearly curious. "Then why isn't she queuing like the rest of us? She went straight in."

I forced a small shrug. "Who knows?"

Another colleague, Millie, tilted her head and asked, "Didn't she become a food delivery person after getting out?"

I felt a strange sense of satisfaction rise in my chest.

"Yes," I said. "She's delivered food to our hospital a few times."

Millie's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Yes," I continued with a smug smile. "I'll order from that restaurant again on Monday. Consider it me doing her a favor."

I smiled politely. But inside, my thoughts were ugly.

Doing her a favor? I mocked myself. No. I'll make sure everyone sees what she's become.

Back when we worked at the same hospital, Bella had always 2/9

been the one people looked up to. Seniors praised her. Patients trusted her. Even when she stayed quiet, she stood out.

And I hated that.

No matter how hard I worked, no matter how careful I was, I always stood behind her shadow. People compared me to her without even realizing it.

Then she fell. She went to prison. She became an outcast. I thought that would finally end everything.

But now.....Why did she walk into that room?

At that moment, a nurse walked past us.

Millie quickly stopped her. "Excuse me, earlier one of your colleagues said regular patients aren't allowed to enter that ultrasound room. But I just saw someone being led in. What's going on?"

The nurse answered calmly, "Oh, that's for our hospital's VIP package customers."

VIP package? My heart skipped.

Millie blinked. "VIP? How much does that cost?"

"That depends," the nurse said. "The cheapest is a few 3/9

thousand. The more comprehensive ones can go up to a few hundred thousand. If you're interested, you can check at the counter on the sixth floor."

With that, the nurse walked away.

I stood there, stunned.

A few thousand... to a few hundred thousand?

That wasn't something a food delivery woman could afford.

Millie slowly turned to look at me. "Julia... are you sure that senior is only doing food delivery?"

My face burned.

“How is that possible?” I blurted out before I could stop myself.

My voice was louder than I intended.

“How could she be a VIP package customer?” I snapped. “But didn’t she go into that room just now?”

Other colleagues nearby began to look over.

I felt it immediately. The attention. The awkward silence.

I had lost control.

I forced myself to calm down. I inhaled deeply and adjusted my expression, forcing a smile onto my face.

“There must be a misunderstanding,” I said lightly. “Hospitals make mistakes sometimes.”

But inside, my mind was in chaos.

No. Something is wrong.

Bella didn’t look like someone who could afford that. Her clothes were nice, yes but not flashy.

Unless...

A thought crept into my mind, and I hated it.

Unless someone paid for her.

That idea made my chest feel heavy.

I stood there, waiting for my turn, but I couldn’t focus anymore. My eyes kept drifting back to that closed ultrasound room door.

What happened to you, Bella? I wondered bitterly. What did you become after prison?

And more importantly Why do I feel so unsettled just seeing you walk ahead of me again?

BELLA’S POV

Inside the ultrasound room, I laid down with my clothes adjusted. The radiologist focused on the screen as she moved the probe carefully across my abdomen.

I watched her face more than the screen.

I had learned long ago that doctors' expressions often spoke before their words. I should know. I was a doctor myself.

Her brows slowly drew together. Instantly, my heart sank.

"Ms. Jameson," she said after a moment, "have you severe trauma to your lower abdomen before?"

suffered

a

My fingers twitched.

"Yes," I answered honestly. "I did."

My throat tightened as memories surfaced.

I remembered the pain. I remembered the cold floor. I remembered being dragged up and beaten over and over again.

"I received treatment at the time," I continued "But the doctor said my uterus was badly damaged. He told me the injury was irreversible."

I paused for a brief second before adding quietly, "He said my body would never fully recover."

The doctor nodded slowly.

"Have you ever had children?" she asked.

"No."

Back then, those three years in prison had dragged me from a life I once believed in straight into hell. Losing my career was one thing. Losing my freedom was another. But being told I might never have children...

That had crushed me completely.

I remembered the nights when I lay awake in my cell, staring into darkness. I remembered wondering what reason I had left to live.

If it hadn't been for Tara visiting me again and again,
reminding me that I was still human, still worthy of living,
I might not have survived that place at all.

The doctor sighed softly.

"I'll let the gynecologist review your report," she said. "We'll see if there's anything we can try."

I froze.

"...Anything?" I repeated, barely daring to hope.

She looked at me "You're still young. Medically speaking, we can't say there's absolutely no possibility. It depends on how your body responds."

I felt hope. Even if it was small. Even if it was fragile. It was still hope.

My eyes burned slightly, but I forced myself to stay calm.

If there was even a chance.....If there was even the slightest possibility-

Then maybe... just maybe...

Kane's face appeared in my mind without warning.

If I could have a child... Then the father would be...

"Alright," the doctor said gently, interrupting my thoughts. "We're done. You can get up now."

I quickly sat up. I adjusted my clothes. My heart was still beating faster than usual.

I couldn't believe what I had just thought. The thought shocked me.

Wanting a child... with Kane?

I followed the nurse out of the ultrasound room. There was no need to wait for the report. Everything would be compiled and sent directly to the consulting doctor, who would then decide which specialist I needed to see next.

I thought the worst part of the morning was over. I was wrong.

Before I could take more than a few steps, a voice cut through the air.

“Did you buy a VIP package for your check-up?”

I stopped. I turned around slowly and saw Julia standing there. Her voice was loud enough for everyone nearby to hear.

“Aren’t you just delivering food to survive?” she continued. “How could you afford such an expensive package?”

Chapter 287

BELLA’S POV

I looked at her calmly. In my eyes, she looked ridiculous.

“I think that’s my personal matter,” I said “I don’t see why I need to explain it to you.”

Her expression changed. Realizing her tone had drawn attention, she immediately softened her voice and put on a concerned look.

“I’m just worried about you,” she said. “You’ve only just come out of prison. If you’re not careful and make the wrong decision, you could end up in trouble again. Doctors tend to be more sensitive about these things.”

I stared at her. Her words sounded kind but her eyes were not.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” she asked

“Nothing,” I replied. “You just look like someone who hopes I’ll end up in trouble again.”

“H-how could that be? We’re ex-colleagues. Of course, I wish you well.”

“Is that so? Then why do you keep mentioning my tinn 09:07

13 Bonus

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prison in front of others? It’s almost like you want everyone here to remember it.”

Her face flushed red.

Around us, people in the queue had gone silent. I could feel

their eyes on us.

Julia tried to speak. "I... that's because—"

She stopped. There was nothing she could say.

I spoke again.

"As medical professionals, we're taught to assess patients based on current symptoms and objective findings," I said. "A patient's past medical history does not mean every new symptom must be judged through prejudice."

I met her eyes. "But when it comes to me, you've already decided what kind of person I am. That's not professional. And it's not ethical."

Her face burned redder.

I didn't wait for a reply. I turned to the nurse beside me. "Let's go to the next station."

The nurse nodded and led me away. I didn't look back. 2/10

09:07

< Chapter 287

Julia remained where she was.

+3 Bonus

I finally finished all the required check-ups. My legs felt a little weak from walking between departments. I followed the signs back to the VIP lounge where Kane was waiting for me.

The moment I stepped inside, his eyes lifted immediately.

"You're done?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, sitting down beside him. "But some of the reports won't be ready this afternoon."

He nodded. "Then let's go eat breakfast. You haven't eaten anything since this morning."

"Okay,"

We left the hospital together, holding hands. I hummed softly with a smile.

Kane asked calmly, "Where do you want to eat?"

"Let's just find a random place nearby," I replied. "I don't feel like anything fancy."

3/10

09:07

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 287

"It's still early," he said. "Most stalls should still be open."

"Okay."

Together, we walked toward the nearby roadside stalls.

The smell of oil, bread, and coffee filled the air. I slowed my steps unconsciously as my eyes landed on a small stall selling hot dogs, fries, and freshly brewed coffee.

I stared a little longer than I realized.

I miss this, I thought. I really miss this.

I turned to him with a grin "Why don't we eat from this stall? I haven't eaten these in a long time."

He followed my gaze and nodded without hesitation. "Alright."

I stepped forward to place the order, then turned back to him. "What do you want?"

"I'll have whatever you're having," he replied. "A full set."

I smiled. I ordered a hot dog, fries, and coffee.

It used to be my favorite breakfast when I was younger. Back then, it was cheap and filling. But over the years, prices rose. Seven dollars for this set now felt expensive. 4/10

09:07

+3 Bonus

<Chapter 287

After I came out of prison, I stopped buying things like this. Seven dollars for breakfast felt like a luxury I couldn't afford.

Most mornings, I kept my spending under two dollars. Sometimes, I skipped breakfast.

While waiting for our food, I suddenly spoke up.

"By the way... after we're done at the hospital today, can you accompany me to the cabin?"

He looked at me. "Why do you want to go there?"

“I want to pick up some things,” I replied. “There are still a few belongings left.”

He thought for a moment. “Let’s go after breakfast. Your reports won’t be ready until the afternoon anyway.”

That made sense.

“Okay,” I agreed.

The stall owner handed us our food. The paper bags felt warm in my hands.

I sat down and began eating without thinking too much. The taste was so comforting. It tasted so damn good.

09:07

+3 Bonus

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As I ate, I felt Kane’s eyes on me. I looked up by instinct and our eyes met.

For a brief second, my thoughts went completely blank.

“Wh... what’s the matter?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he said calmly. “I just think you’re very pretty.”

I froze. Pretty?

I knew my own condition. I hadn’t taken good care of myself for years. My skincare routine had been neglected. My face wasn’t glowing or flawless. At best, I looked ordinary.

And yet- he looked so genuine.

“You should eat,” I urged quickly, feeling embarrassed. “The food will get cold.”

He smiled. “Alright.”

He lowered his head and started eating. I watched him quietly.

He ate the hot dog and fries directly from the paper bag. Even with something so simple, his movements looked refined.

Kane Stonewood... eating breakfast at a roadside stall, I thought. 6/10

2009:07

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A man who could dominate Byron City without effort. A man people feared and whispered about.

And here he was, sitting beside me, eating cheap food without complaint.

And I'm dating him... The thought still felt unreal.

If one day... If we could have children...

My chest got tight. I quickly looked away.

After breakfast, Kane drove us to the cabin.

When I opened the door, dust floated into the air. It had been two or three months since I last came back.

I began cleaning and packing. Most important things had already been moved to the Stone wood Residence. What remained were some old clothes, shoes, bedding, and kitchenware.

I packed everything quickly. I didn't own much.

"What are you planning to do with these?" Kane asked.

09:07

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The kitchenware and bedding, can be sold at the second-hand shop," I said, "The clothes and shoes can still be worn, so I'll take them back"

He looked at the things but didn't say a word,

"I'll take these to the second-hand shop," I added. "You can wait here,"

Before I could lift the bags properly, Kane took them from my hands.

"Let me carry them," he said. "Open the door for me."

"Oh."

I opened the door quickly and followed him out.

"Let me carry some," I said. "My hands are empty."

"There's no need," he replied firmly. "You lead the way."

I didn't argue.

I walked ahead, occasionally looking back at him. He looked completely out of place in his suit and tie, carrying old kitchenware and bedding.

We reached *the* junction where the second–**hand collector**

09:07

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usually stood.

“Mister,” I said, “will you take these?”

“Of course,” the man replied cheerfully.

When he saw Kane, he froze for a moment.

He inspected the items, then pulled me aside and whispered, “Young lady, don’t be fooled by looks. If he were truly rich, he wouldn’t let you sell these for money.”

I smiled politely. He had no idea that this was my doing. If it was up to Kane, we’d throw the se away. But Kane respected my independence and I loved it.

“He’s my boyfriend. I know him.”

The man sighed, unconvinced.

I sold the items for one hundred dollars. On the way back, Kane suddenly asked, “What did that man say to you earlier?”

I teased lightly, “He warned me not to be tricked by you.”

He looked at me. “Would you believe him?”

I looked straight into his eyes.

9/10

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“No,” I said. “I trust you.”

And I realized....I truly meant it.

Chapter 288

BELLA'S POV

Kane suddenly stopped walking.

I frowned slightly. "What is it?"

He didn't answer immediately. His eyes stayed locked on mine for a moment.

"What if I would?" he finally asked.

My smile froze. For a moment, I didn't understand what he meant. Then his words settled in my head.

What if I would lie to you?

I swallowed and forced myself to look at him seriously.

"Kane," I said quietly, "I don't like it when someone lies to me. I've always believed that if a relationship is going to last, the most basic thing is honesty. Even if we don't tell everything... at least don't lie."

He didn't speak. He didn't look away either.

That silence made my heart pound harder. 1/10

09:07

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

"Would you lie to me?" I asked again.

This time, my voice shook a bit.

I hated how anxious I sounded, but I couldn't stop it.

Please don't say yes, I thought. Please don't tell me something I can't accept.

If we couldn't even agree on this, how were we supposed to continue with this relationship?

His hands clenched into fists. The movement was small, but I noticed it.

Then he spoke "I won't."

The tightness in my chest loosened instantly. I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding.

Thank the goddess.

I could finally breathe. He seemed to notice the relief on my face.

“Why?” he asked softly. “Were you afraid my answer wouldn’t be something you wanted to hear?”

I nodded and rubbed my nose, feeling embarrassed. “A little.” 2/10

09:07

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

Then I looked at him seriously again. “Anyway, I won’t lie to you about anything. So neither should you.”

“Okay,” he replied. “But what if my answer just now was ‘I would’?”

That question caught me off guard. I stared at him. I felt my heart sinking a little.

Why would he ask that? Does he want to know my bottom line?

I thought carefully before answering. I didn’t want to lie, not even in a hypothetical situation.

I bit my lip lightly.

“Then...” I said slowly, “I think I would ask for a breakup.”

The words felt heavy the moment they left my mouth. I forced myself to continue.

“If we don’t share the same values, especially about honesty, then the road ahead would be very difficult. I’d rather end it early than wait until things get worse.”

I looked at the floor as memories hit me.

“I’ve been cheated on before,” I added quietly. “I don’t want to

3/10

09:07

() +3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

go through that again.”

Memories flooded my mind.

Damien's voice. His promises. His hand holding mine as he said he loved me. He said he would protect me. He said he would find the best lawyer to help me get out of prison.

But when I was locked behind bars, he stood outside with Kathy by his side.

He said he wanted to break up. He watched silently as my life collapsed.

From that moment on, I couldn't trust anyone.

Before I could react, Kane suddenly pulled me into his arms.

"We'll never break up!" he said.

His arms wrapped around me so tightly that my breath was knocked out of me.

My face pressed against his chest. I could hear his heartbeat through his shirt. His heartbeat was fast, almost frantic.

"I'm just saying..." I struggled to speak. "It's just a hypothesis..."

4/10

09:07

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

"Not even a hypothesis," he interrupted urgently.

His arms tightened again.

"Kane... you need to loosen up a little. I can't breathe..."

He loosened his grip slightly, but he didn't let go.

"Sis," he said softly, lowering his head to look at me. "Don't ever tell me you want to break up. Okay?"

His eyes were filled with something unfamiliar – fear.

It shocked me. I had never seen him like this. It was as if the thought of losing me alone could make him fall apart.

Was I really that important to him?

Without thinking, I raised my arms and hugged him back.

“Okay,” I said quietly. “I won’t say the word ‘breakup.’”

At that moment, I didn’t think about what that promise meant.

I just didn’t want to see him look like that again.

In the afternoon, we returned to the hospital. The reports were 5/10

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+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

ready.

The doctor explained that my old injuries were the main issue. Although they had healed, my joints would still ache when the weather turned cold or humid.

“It will improve with long-term recuperation,” the doctor said. “It’s not serious.”

Then came the harder part. The gynecologist looked at my report carefully.

“The injury to your uterus is more complicated,” she said. “You’ll need a period of recuperative care before we consider surgery.”

“So... I still have a chance?” I asked.

She nodded. “If your body responds well, your chances are around thirty percent.”

Thirty percent. For others, it might sound low. For me, it was hope.

“Then let’s start,” Kane said immediately.

He didn’t even hesitate. After collecting the medication, we finally left the hospital.

6/10

09:07

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+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

“Kane,” I said softly with tear in my eyes. “Thank you.”

“There’s no need to thank me,” he replied. “You’re too polite with me.”

“If you hadn’t brought me here,” I said, “I wouldn’t have known I still had a chance to be a mother.”

Hope filled my chest. For the first time in years, I was excited for myself. Not for survival. Not for endurance.

But for the future.

“So,” Kane suddenly asked, “you’re planning to have a child with me, right?”

I froze. My face heated up instantly.

“I... I...”

“You can’t say no,” he said, pulling me close by the waist. “I won’t have children with anyone else.”

“Kane,” I whispered. I was mortified. “We’re still in the hospital.”

“So what?” he said, leaning closer. “Do you understand what I’m saying?”

7/10

09:08

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

My body trembled. I nodded.

He led me to the car. As soon as we both got in, he drove off.

In the car, I kept glancing at him. His profile was perfect.

If we had children... What would they look like?

“Do you like looking at me that much?” he asked.

I jumped in shock. I was about to say something, then my phone rang.

It was Tara.

I answered. “Hello?”

“Bella? Is it convenient for you to talk right now?”

“Yes. It is.”

“When are you free?” Tara asked. “I want us to go to Melgrad.”

Melgrad..

“We should hurry,” Tara continued. “The witness is currently in police custody. Thomas said he has a way to make him talk. He asked if you want to be involved.”

8/10

09:08

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My grip on the phone tightened.

“Thomas?” I repeated slowly. “You told him that I want to reopen my case?”

I wasn’t angry, but I was surprised.

On the other end, Tara chuckled nervously. “Hehe... well... I thought he had more connections than I do. So I asked him to help investigate. I’m sorry. I forgot to tell you earlier.”

I closed my eyes briefly.

She had always been like this. Acting first, apologizing later.

“You don’t need to apologize,” I said honestly. “You’re helping me.”

And she truly was.

Even though I didn’t like Thomas much, I knew Tara wouldn’t involve him unless she felt it was necessary.

“When will you be free?” she asked. “He said the guy is only being detained for seven days. If we miss this window, it might be harder later.”

I thought for a moment.

9/10

09:08

+3 Bonus

< Chapter 288

"Tomorrow," I said.

"Tomorrow?" Tara sounded surprised. "Don't you have work?"

"The restaurant is closed for a few days," I replied. "So I'm free."

"That's perfect," she said immediately. "I'm free too."

"Then tomorrow," I said. "You can pick me up."

"Alright. I'll inform Thomas and confirm the time. I'll message you once everything's set."

"Okay," I replied softly.

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Chapter 289

BELLA'S POV

+19 Bonus

"Yes."

The word had barely left my lips when Kane spoke again.

"Why?" he asked calmly. "Did she ask Thomas to help with your case?"

I shook my head slowly. "Not really. She asked Thomas to investigate a witness in Melgrad. She said the witness is currently in detention. Thomas said he has ways to make him talk."

As I spoke, my fingers unconsciously tightened around the strap of my bag.

"I'm going to Melgrad tomorrow," I added.

The car remained quiet for a few seconds. I stared at the road ahead, but my thoughts were already elsewhere.

Detention... witnesses... Melgrad.

I had been a doctor once. I

had seen many cases even in the hospital. I knew better than anyone that it was not easy to meet a detainee, much less make him talk. With Tara along it would

+19 Bonus

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have been impossible. Which meant Thomas had intervened.

That realization made my chest feel heavy.

Tara had once again asked Thomas for help because of me.

How many favors had she already used up for my sake?
How much had she already sacrificed?

Would I ever be able to repay her?

I lowered my eyes. I felt my mood sinking.

“I’ll go with you tomorrow,” Kane said suddenly.

I turned to him, startled. “It’s okay. I’ll just go with Tara.”

“You’re my girlfriend,” Kane said “Why would it bother me to accompany you?”

His tone was calm, but final.

“It’s settled,” he continued. “I’ll go with you tomorrow.”

His hand tightened slightly on the steering wheel.

The fact that he wanted to accompany me was sweet but I didn’t want to bother him. I knew how busy he was.

2/8

22:10

+19 Bonus

< Chapter 289

I hesitated. “Kane...”

“I’m not discussing this,” he said.

I swallowed the rest of my words.

For some reason, my heart felt both uneasy and reassured at the same time.

That

night, after returning to Stonewood Residence, I went to my room and lay on the bed with my phone in my hand.

After a long moment, my phone rang.

It was Tara.

I answered immediately. "Hello?"

"Bella," Tara said. "I just finished arranging things with Thomas."

I sat up slightly. "What did he say?"

"He confirmed the witness is still in detention. Tomorrow morning would be best," she replied. "We should leave early."

"Alright," I said softly.

3/8

22:10

+19 Bonus

< Chapter 289

There was a brief pause on the line. Then I remembered something important.

"Oh, right," I said hesitantly. "Well... Kane—Kane wants to go too."

"What?" Tara exclaimed. "He's going too?"

"Yes," I said, suddenly feeling nervous. "Is that... okay?"

Tara was silent for a moment. Then she laughed lightly. "There's nothing inconvenient about it. It's just one extra person. That's actually kind of sweet."

She paused, then added thoughtfully, "But why don't we go in one car?"

"One car?" I repeated.

"Yes," Tara said. "If we go in two cars, it won't be convenient to talk. If we go in one car, they can take turns driving when they're tired."

Her suggestion made sense. It could work that way.

"Sure," I said. "I'll talk to him."

“Alright,” Tara replied. “I’ll pick you up tomorrow morning. I’ll

4/8

22:11

13

+19 Bonus

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send you the time.”

After hanging up, I placed my phone on the bed and lay back down.

My heart wouldn’t calm down. I kept thinking about

tomorrow...

Would I finally be able to extract the truth from that witness? Would I finally learn why he testified that I was drunk?

Would I finally find out who wanted to destroy me so badly? I had helped countless people uncover the truth in their cases in the hospital.. Yet I had failed to uncover the truth in my own.

How ridiculous. How pathetic.

My eyes slowly closed, but sleep didn’t come easily.

JAYDEN’S POV

The study in Stonewood Residence was quiet. The whole place was heavy with tension.

Kane stood by the desk. His posture was straight, his presence cold.

I had rushed over as soon as I received his mind link.

5/8

22:11

** +19 Bonus

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“Go to Melgrad,” Kane instructed calmly. “The police arrested a man. He was one of the witnesses in Bella’s case.”

My heart skipped slightly.

“Bella is going to see him tomorrow,” Kane continued. “Tell him what to say. And what not to say.”

“Yes,” I replied immediately.

I hesitated for a brief second before speaking again.

live

“Young Master Stonewood... aren’t you going to let Miss Jameson know the truth about what happened back then?”

Kane turned his head slowly.

“Do you think I should let her know the truth?” he asked.

His voice was calm, too calm. But the chill in his eyes made my spine go cold.

I instantly realized I had touched a forbidden subject.

“I... I spoke out of turn,” I said quickly.

This was not something Kane allowed anyone to interfere in.

The lawsuit. Bella. This was his sore spot.

6/8

22:11

+19 Bonus

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“I’ll go to Melgrad now,” I said.

Kane didn’t respond. I turned and left the study.

Just outside, I nearly ran into Bella. She was walking toward the study door.

“Are you looking for Alpha Stonewood, Miss Jameson?” I asked respectfully.

I already regarded her as the future mistress of the Stonewood family. I had never seen Kane take a woman this seriously.

Not even Sophia who had once been so close had ever been treated like this.

“Yes,” Bella replied gently. “Did something urgent happen with the company that brought you here so late?”

“Yes,” I said. “But it’s not very important. I’ll take my leave now.”

“Goodbye, then, Jayden,” she said.

I watched as she knocked twice and entered the study. The door closed softly.

I let out a quiet sigh. I knew it.

7/8

22:11

+19 Bonus

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Bella would not get the truth she wanted tomorrow. It would be buried once again.

Even though Kane was not the one who framed her... Back then, he had stood by and done nothing.

And now? He was probably regretting it....deeply.

I turned and walked downstairs.

There was a lot to prepare tonight.

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BELLA'S POV

+16 Bonus

I stood quietly in the study doorway.

Kane was by the window. He had one hand in his pocket and the other resting against the glass. The night lights outside reflected on his face.

When he turned around and saw me, his expression softened immediately, and a small smile appeared at the corner of his lips.

“What are you doing here?” he asked gently.

“I just wanted to tell you something,” I said as I walked closer. “Tara will pick us up tomorrow. She said it’s easier if we all go in one car. That way we can talk freely, and if anyone gets tired driving, someone else can take over.”

He listened quietly. His eyes never left my face.

“Sure,” he replied. “No problem.”

We’ll leave at seven in the morning,” I added. “**It’s** a 16:40

two-hour drive so we should reach Melgrad a **little after**

+16 Bonus

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nine.”

“No problem. Since we’re leaving early, you should go to

bed soon.”

I nodded “What about you?”

“I still have some things to take care of,” he said calmly. “You go to bed first. I’ll sleep after I’m done.”

That answer didn’t surprise me.

He ran a company that controlled half of Byron City’s economic pulse. Of course, he was busy. Still, a small part of me felt reluctant to leave. I wanted his attention.

I turned around and took two steps toward the door. Before I could reach it, a strong arm wrapped around my

waist.

In the next second, I was pulled backward and pressed

into his chest.

“Kane-” I gasped.

His arms tightened around me firmly. Our bodies were

pressed closely together.

16:40

&

+16 Bonus

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“What’s the matter?” I asked softly.

“Nothing,” he murmured. “I just want to hold you like this for a while.”

He lowered his head and buried his face in my neck. I felt his breath against my skin. He inhaled slowly, deeply, as if he was memorizing my scent.

It felt like... comfort. Like this simple act of holding me was calming him.

Why does he look like he needs this so badly? For a moment, I thought he looked almost childish. He held me like a child afraid of losing something precious.

And somehow, I was that something. My heart softened.

And honestly? I didn’t mind it. I liked being in his arms. I

loved it. He made me feel safe and cared for.

I raised my hands and hugged him back. The moment my arms wrapped around him, his body shook a little. Just a little. But I felt it.

After a while, his low voice sounded near my ear.

16:40

+16 Bonus

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“I like the way you’re holding me, Sis,” he said quietly. “Will you hold me a little longer?”

His tone was affectionate. He sounded almost vulnerable.

How could I say no?

“Sure,” I replied.

I tightened my arms around him without thinking.

Early the next morning, Tara arrived at the entrance of Stonewood Residence right on time.

When I stepped outside, I saw her car parked neatly by the gate. Thomas was there too. He stood beside the driver's seat.

Tara didn't even give Kane and Thomas a chance to speak – properly. She grabbed my wrist immediately and pulled

me toward the back seat.

“Come on,” she said. “Let's sit together.”

4/10

16:40

+16 Bonus

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Before I could react, I was already seated beside her. I was about to ask Tara what the hell was wrong with her. How would Kane and Thomas get along? They had so much tension between them.

Kane and Thomas exchanged a brief look at the gate. Neither spoke.

There was an invisible tension between them.

“Is Thomas driving later?” I asked as the car door closed.

“Yes,” Tara said casually. “Driving *is* men's work.”

I looked forward.

“Do you have the questions ready?” she asked.

“Yes,” I nodded. “They're all in my notes. But I won't be the one asking him. He'll recognize me.”

“Thomas arranged a mediator,” Tara said. “The mediator will ask everything.”

I looked at her in surprise. They really had everything planned out. Even I didn't think of that “I didn't expect:

him to be this thorough.”

+16 Bonus

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Tara smiled proudly. Then a thought hit me as I realized something.

“But... isn’t it too coincidental?” I asked slowly. “That witness just happened to be in detention when we started investigating?”

Tara chuckled.

“Oh, that?” she said lightly. “Thomas arranged it.”

“...Arranged it?”

“He got some people drunk, caused trouble with the witness, and let the witness beat them,” she explained

casually, like she was talking about the weather “Now he’s detained.”

I was speechless.

“That man isn’t innocent anyway,” Tara continued. “He made a fortune from your case and only got a light

punishment. This is nothing.”

I didn’t know whether to laugh or sigh.

6/10

16:40

+18 Bonus

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“I didn’t know Thomas could be so... direct.”

Tara leaned back comfortably. “I praised him for it,”

After praising him... I could guess the rest.

For some reason, that didn’t bother her. Actually... she looked quite pleased.

“I didn’t expect you to come today, Alpha Stonewood,” Thomas said suddenly from the front.

“Bella is my girlfriend,” Kane replied calmly. “Anything involving her involves me.”

Thomas smiled “The deceased in Bella’s case was your fiancée, Sophia,” he said. “Do you believe Bella is guilty or innocent?”

The air froze. Kane’s eyes turned cold instantly.

His eyes were dark and they looked dangerous. I swallowed hard. I could already sense trouble.

“I will do justice to her,” he said.

7/10

Nothing more. Nothing less.

16:40

+16 Bonus

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Thomas didn’t push further.

“I didn’t expect you to help my girlfriend investigate her case, Alpha Sulkin,” Kane added. “I should thank you.”

Thomas chuckled. “Do you want to get in the car? If we delay any longer, we’ll arrive late.”

“Let’s go,” Kane replied.

As soon as they both got in, Tara and I looked at each other then sighed in relief.

“Thank the goddess” I muttered.

“I thought they were gonna kill each other out there” Tara murmured.

Soon enough, the car finally started moving.

If outsiders knew who was sitting in this car, they would be shocked. In the front seats were two men who

controlled entire empires of the continent.

In the back were two women quietly changing fate.

8/10

16:40

+18 Bonus

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On the road, the men were silent. The women talked but it was mostly Tara.

“There’s a drama everyone’s watching lately,” Tara said. “It’s called The King’s Lover. Have you seen it?”

I shook my head.

I barely had time to breathe these days, let alone watch dramas.

“The male lead is Tom Yuri,” she continued. “You used to like him a lot.”

I was stunned. How long had it been since I heard that name?

Before prison... I used to follow his shows, recommend them, even buy endorsements. Back then, I still believed in futures.

Listening to Tara talk about it felt like time folding back

on itself. For the first time in a long while, I felt... relaxed.

Even though something important awaited us. Even though truth and pain might be waiting.

16:41

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In this car, surrounded by these people...

I felt safe.