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FORECAST

DUDLEY MUTATINA

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— Belding —

Belding hated having damp feet, but he dragged himself down the flooded street anyway. Water sloshed in his boots. The crowds lining the street huddled under umbrellas, too busy protesting politics to notice him. Neither the frequent flashes of lightning nor the torrential downpour deterred them in the slightest. “Bunch of idiots wasting their time,” he muttered. No one paid him any mind as he headed towards the house, but he still turned his head every few seconds to ensure he wasn’t being followed. Better safe than sorry. Belding nonchalantly tapped his chest to the rhythm of his heartbeat, creating a clone of himself that he stationed at the street corner. The real Belding popped up his collar and continued through the thunderstorm.

Avina opened the door after the second knock. She pulled him inside and bolted it shut.

“Think you could ease up on the rain?” Belding’s jacket was soaked through.

“It’s late April. No one’s gonna suspect anything.” She stood by the window and peered through the drapes. Belding joined her.

The house overlooked the main road leading down to the community center just across the river. The water threatened to spill onto the bridge. Officers herded dedicated supporters and disgruntled opposition alike to the staging area for the governor’s address.

“How’d it go on your end?” she asked.

“Four plus me. Everyone’s at their stations.”

Police lights flashed in the direction of the governor’s house. Just across the street, mixed in with the crowd, one of Belding’s clones popped up its collar.

Avina smiled wide. “Right on time.”

Belding dropped onto the couch. “Now it’s my turn to be all warm and cozy.”

“You know what keeps me nice and warm?” She pulled on a black rain poncho.

“Money.”

He closed his eyes and smiled to himself. “Then it’s about to get toasty.”

— Edvin —

Edvin adjusted his tie in the mirror and ran a hand over his shaved head, the edges perfectly trimmed. Despite being in his twenties, his parents never let him grow it out. Said it made him look more distinguished. Every time he came home to make a public appearance, they immediately took him to their barber.

At least he had a say over the suit. It was tailor made and fit him perfectly—light gray looked good against his brown skin. He straightened his posture and forced his face to smile. Maybe looking good would give him the confidence he needed to get through the day.

“You almost ready?” Marietta crossed her arms and leaned against the doorframe. Lukas lingered awkwardly behind her. Lukas stood a good foot taller than the both of them, despite being the youngest.

Edvin sighed deeply, his weak attempt at a smile fading. “Physically, yes. Emotionally, no.”

Rumors about Edvin’s clairvoyance circulated the news. People accused him of rigging the election in his father’s favor.

“Governor and psychic son had unfair advantage over competition”

“ ‘I knew he couldn’t be trusted.’ Candidates come forward”

“Local medium caught in large political scandal”

Today, the whole family was making a public appearance to deny the rumors and allegations. He knew better than to be public about his ability. People who had insight into the

future frequently went...missing, soon after their powers became public knowledge. Moments like this, Edvin wished he had a less interesting ability, like flying or telekinesis.

Marietta and Lukas joined him in front of the mirror. "I doubt they're even gonna believe me," Edvin said, "it's already in people's heads. How would I even prove I'm not?"

"We're beyond trying to prove you don't have any powers," Marietta said coolly, "the primary goal is to prove you and dad didn't mess with the elections."

"We have extra security, too. So, at least you don't have to worry about anything bad happening," Lukas added.

Edvin closed his eyes. If he had better control of his ability, maybe he could have predicted what the day would bring. It definitely would have put him at ease. But every attempt turned up blank. When he tried focusing on the future, all he saw was a rush of water pulling him deeper into its depths. He clutched his chest and steadied his breathing. All he wanted to do was move abroad under a new name until the whole thing blew over.

"Kids? Oh, there you are." Their mother walked past the door, putting on her earrings. "Let's go, the motorcade is waiting."

"Remind me to never get into politics," Edvin muttered.

Marietta placed a hand on Edvin's shoulder and smiled sympathetically. "After this, I doubt they'd ever let you run."

Conjuring a storm this size took a lot out of Avina, but it would be worth it once their plan succeeded. She pulled up her hood and slipped outside. She immediately became one with the rain, weaving her way between people like a fish in the ocean. It made her feel alive, and as long as she kept the rain falling, no one could detect her.

Despite all the rain, there was still a large turnout. What were people so worked up about? Whether the governor's kid actually cheated or not, what difference would it make? Avina would never understand the die-hard political fanatics.

She moved towards the beginning of the motorcade, closest to the governor's house. Large crowds pushed up against the security personnel blocking street access. No one noticed her. To them, she was just a sudden gust of wind and water.

The first car passed through the gates. It was a decoy, carrying only security. The second was also a decoy with more security. The third carried the wife and daughter, followed by another decoy. Then came the one she wanted. Right in the middle, the target and the other son.

Avina focused on the following car, and her heart skipped with glee as a bolt of lightning struck the engine. People scrambled back as the car swerved and came to a stop, smoke rising from the hood. The cars behind it slammed on their brakes. She floated to catch up to the rest of the motorcade and did the same.

Her plan was working flawlessly, but it was still too early to celebrate. The next step would determine their success or failure. The target car swerved and rammed into the bridge railing. Security yelled at everyone to move back. Avina waited with bated breath. Even the rain seemed to slow down.

After a minute—that felt more like an hour—the driver's door finally opened. Avina smirked and seized the opportunity without hesitation.

— Marietta —

Marietta knew from the very beginning that this wasn't a regular storm. Spring rain had a calm, caring nature about it. This storm was near impossible to see through and lightning flashed like it had a vendetta against the world. She scanned the entire street as they left the house. She blinked a few times and the storm cleared from her vision. She narrowed her eyes and zoomed in on the main street leading to the community center. Her eyes registered each individual person. Nothing out of the ordinary. Though she never understood the loyalty—or hatred—that got people to stand in the pouring rain all day for a political figure.

An attendant held an umbrella for her and her mother and ushered them into their vehicle. Her mom sat down with a long sigh. "Please don't do that in front of the cameras. We don't need another scandal on our hands."

Marietta blinked and returned to normal vision. "Just wanted a better look at the crowd."

"I can't wait to get this over with."

The car lurched forward. Marietta leaned her head against the window and watched the water cascade down. Between the rain and the tinted windows, she could barely make out the people outside.

"You children shouldn't have to deal with all this." Her mother placed her hand around Marietta's shoulder.

Marietta was about to respond when a call came through the driver's radio. "*Six and seven are stalled out.*"

Marietta screamed as lightning struck the car. The lights flickered off as the car screeched to a halt. She turned to her mom wide-eyed. "Edvin."

— Lukas —

Lukas climbed into the car after his brother. He swore cars were getting smaller. His legs pressed against the back of the front seat. Fortunately, it was just a few minutes to the center. He shifted uncomfortably until finding a decent sitting position.

Edvin's leg bounced up and down as he stared blankly ahead. Lukas wasn't sure what to say. What could he say? He didn't know what it was like to have an ability like the other two.

He opened his mouth to offer words of encouragement, but was interrupted by a flash of lightning from the front windshield. A loud crackling sound shook the entire car.

“Shit!” The driver exclaimed. Lukas and Edvin held on to the grab handles as the car swerved violently and crashed into the bridge railing. Dark smoke billowed from the hood. Lukas exchanged a concerned look with Edvin.

“That was some wicked lightning.” The driver undid his seatbelt. “Get out before this thing blows.” He opened the door and a huge gust of wind and rain filled the car. Lukas shielded his eyes. The driver cursed under his breath as he stepped out—although it almost looked like he was pulled out. The door slammed shut after him.

Then they were airborne. Lukas's stomach lurched as the car plummeted nose first into the rushing river. They landed with a loud *splashing* sound. Lukas rubbed his head after it banged against the front seat. He looked to the empty space next to him. “Edvin? Edvin!”

Large cracks spiderwebbed in the windshield and murky water quickly seeped in all around him. His heart raced as he pushed against the door, but it didn't budge. Not even the windows would open. By now, the entire car was submerged. He awkwardly scrambled to the front and began kicking the windshield.

— Edvin —

Edvin held his breath as he was engulfed by water. It had an almost living presence to it. He couldn't explain why or how. Even more strange, it felt like he was...being carried off? Did they drive into the river? His lungs were about to burst.

He suddenly hit the ground hard, landing face first in the mud and gasping for air. Two sets of hands were immediately on him. He tried screaming out, but someone covered his mouth. They hoisted him to his feet. Two men in gray rain ponchos stood on either side. Neither looked at him, and their hoods obscured most of their faces. Who were they? How'd he end up outside of the car? Where was Lukas?

In front of him, a woman stood. Or at least, he thought it was a person. She appeared to be part of the rain itself. She smiled.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. I'll keep this short: you work with me, I'll work with you. Do what we say, and the rest of your family will be left alone.”

What was she talking about? Edvin writhed but the two men tightened their grips.

The woman tilted her head. “I recommend you cooperate. Nod if you agree.”

Whatever was going on, he had to play along. For the sake of his family. He nodded slowly. The woman clasped her hands together. “Smart decision. We'll chat more later. Gotta tie up some...loose ends.” She winked. “Oh, don't worry. So long as you don't give these fine gentlemen any trouble, your family will be fine. Most likely.”

A violent gust of wind sent rain whipping around them and she was gone. The men half dragged, half carried him off. Edvin tried to get a read on them, but both of their futures turned up empty. They were oddly lifeless, yet surprisingly strong.

The day just kept getting worse.

— Valencia —

Valencia held the phone away from her ear as her husband shouted at his staff. *“We hired you for a reason. Go do your fucking job!”*

“Roldo, what’s going on over there?”

“I’ll figure this out darling, don’t worry.”

“Figure what—Roldo?” The call ended. She dialed Edwin’s number, but there was no answer. She tried Lukas. He picked up after the first ring.

“Mom?”

“Lukas, sweetheart, are you boys okay? What’s going on?”

“Lightnini...car...in the riv...got out but...phone’s...”

“Lukas, you’re breaking up. Where are you two? What’s going on?”

“I’m...k...vin’s gone....”

“Hang tight. Your father and I...I’ll figure some—Lukas?”

Valencia’s heart sank and her face grew hot. She buried her head in her hands and took slow, deep breaths to contain herself. All these years, they’d tried so hard to keep Edwin’s ability secret. She knew something like this would happen if people found out. If only she hadn’t married into a family with abilities. Her parents had warned her.

“Mom?”

Valencia brought her head up. “Get me out of this car.” She pushed against the door but it refused to budge. “I’ll walk there if I have to. Unlock the doors,” she demanded the driver.

“The locks are busted, Madam Percival.” The driver slammed into his door to no avail.

“The lightning must have messed with the interface,” Marietta said.

“Then turn this car around.”

The driver turned the keys in the ignition, but the engine merely sputtered and gave out. The car merely swayed gently from side to side, as if floating.

Marietta's eyes switched from brown to black as she looked around. "The whole street's flooded. We wouldn't go anywhere even if we wanted to."

"That's impossible. It's just another thunderstorm."

"This isn't a normal storm, mom."

— Roldo —

Roldo had quit smoking three years ago, just before swearing in to his role as governor. After that first year sober, he'd felt like he was given a second chance at life.

The three packs in his coat pocket weighed on him, despite two being empty. Smoking was the only thing that eased his nerves as of late. He hated that it worked. Being associated with an outed clairvoyant only worsened an already stressful position.

He leaned against the side of the community center. A secluded spot below a covering where no one would spot him. He instructed his advisors to not bother him unless they had an update. They'd never find the boy. But there was no way he could ever tell them. Or Valencia.

Roldo's hand shook as he brought the cigarette to his lips. He held the smoke in his mouth for a few seconds before blowing it out. If only his problems could float away like that. "God I hope this works." He went to take another drag, but a strong gust of wind ripped the cigarette from his hands.

"Smoking's bad for you, you know."

She appeared as silently and suddenly as ever. Roldo still couldn't tell if she was fully human or a spirit, only ever appearing like an apparition in the rain. She held the cigarette between her fingers and examined it curiously.

He held his hand out for her to return it. "All this thunder and lightning seems a bit excessive," he grumbled.

"I don't tell you how to do your job." She casually flicked the cigarette into the mud and chuckled. "Though you clearly need all the help you can get."

Roldo resisted the urge to snap at her, knowing full well what she was capable of. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a briefcase the size of a keychain. As he tossed it to her,

he reverted it to its original size. Not nearly as useful an ability as summoning an entire thunderstorm, but still effective when it counted.

“It’s all there,” he assured.

“I should hope so, or who knows what might happen to him. Or worse: your career,” she mocked. She clicked it open and smiled at the bills inside. “When it comes to making it rain, you’ve got me beat, old man.”

“Will...will he be...” Roldo clenched his fists and stared at his feet.

She slammed the case shut with an overdramatic *snap*. “Now you want to play the concerned parent?”

“Just...don’t hurt him. Ok?”

She laughed. A cold, icy sound. Roldo looked around nervously to make sure they weren’t being watched. “I’ll hold up my end. But I can’t guarantee anything after he’s out of our hands.”

“Hold on. But you said—”

She saluted him as the wind picked up around them. “Pleasure doing business with you, governor. May we never meet again.”

She was gone.

The rain in the courtyard finally let up and an eerie silence followed. Roldo’s entire body trembled. He had made a mistake. But there was no going back. This was the only way out of his situation. If he ever wanted a chance to run again...

“Governor Percival.” One of his advisors ran to him. Their umbrella did little to keep them dry. “Police say they might have a lead.”

It would lead to a dead end. Roldo had made sure of it. And while he may never be able to face his family, he still had to face the people. He had a re-election to win. And an image to save.

He straightened his tie and followed the advisor. "Show me."

— Belding —

The commotion outside didn't quite sync up with the livestreams. Not that Belding expected it to. Most news stations cut their feeds at the first signs of trouble. Which, wouldn't that be the best time to record? People loved a good show.

Fortunately, Clone Number One had a clear view from an adjacent rooftop. It live-streamed the chaos straight to Belding's phone. There was something comedic about watching them splash about. The drivers and security detail all argued with each other. Firemen tried desperately to pry open the car doors. The other son narrowly escaped the sinking car and was now being examined by a medic. An excessive amount of security surrounded the car with the wife and daughter. As if any of them would be worth more than the target.

The back door opened and footsteps scuffled into the main room. "I told you dunderheads to be gentle!" Belding looked up from his phone and grinned wide. "Why, 'ello govna! Edvin, right? Can I call you Ed? Big fan."

The governor's son narrowed his brows in confusion. Or maybe it was anger. Fear? Sadness? The tape over his mouth made it hard to tell, but any of those would have made sense.

"Oh, come on. I've waited my whole life to say that. At least pretend to laugh." Belding jumped up from the couch and walked towards them. Ed flinched, but Belding's clones maintained their grip. He smiled proudly. It had taken him years to perfect the art of cloning.

"Don't worry. As I'm sure my associate told you, we won't hurt you. Assuming you play nice." Belding examined Ed closely. His suit looked expensive, despite the mud and grass stains. He was certainly well kept. Composed, even in the face of danger. Belding expected nothing less. "Sorry about the suit though. Hate to see a fine thing like that go to waste. But you probably saw it coming, right?" He laughed to himself.

Part of Belding felt a little guilty. As bad as his relationship with his parents was, he couldn't imagine one of them trying to sell him on the Dark Trade. The kid hadn't done anything wrong. He was just born into the wrong family with a highly coveted ability.

But the other half of him couldn't stop thinking about the reward. Clairvoyants went for *fortunes* on the Dark Trade. One as high profile as Edwin Percival would go for at least a few million. Belding had already been contacted by numerous buyers. He was confident he and Avina would be able to milk as much money out of him as humanly possible, on top of what they were getting for pulling off this gig. He smiled even wider at the prospect.

The back door flew open a second time, accompanied by wind and rain. Avina held the briefcase up for them to see. "Good to go."

Any lingering guilt faded away. Belding placed a hand on Ed's shoulder and gave a sympathetic smile. "Hey, believe me when I say it's nothing personal." After today, the kid would be none of their concern.

Nothing more than another paycheck.