

Secret Admiration Finding True Love After Prison

Chapter 1 – 10

Chapter 1 Be Released

“Meryl, get yourself a job and be a good person out there.” the prison guard said as he opened the gate.

1/5

Meryl Stone nodded absently. Finally. She never thought she'd survive those three brutal years.

Rain drizzled from the gray sky as she stepped out of the prison. The biting wind made her shiver and she hugged herself for warmth.

Suddenly, a sleek Porsche Cayenne pulled up beside her.

Seeing the license plate made her face drain of color.

The window rolled down, revealing a man's cold, emotionless face- Dalton Aniston, the man she had loved for seven years, her

fiancé.

The same man who had made sure she ended up in prison!

“Why are you limping?” He asked, his voice icy.

Meryl's eyes stung with unshed tears. Didn't he know why she **was** limping? From her first day in prison, she had been beaten by the other inmates. They said Dalton had paid them to make her suffer.

“Get in,” Dalton commanded, his arm resting casually on the

Chapter 1 Be Released

window frame. His custom suit highlighted his tall, imposing frame, and he radiated a cold, aristocratic aloofness.

2/5

Meryl recognized the impatience in his voice, just like that of her parents'.

When Meryl was 14, she came back to the Stone family. Her parents felt bad at first and wanted to make up for lost time. But Lydia, who they'd raised for 14 years, messed things up. She got them to push Meryl away bit by bit.

By the time Meryl turned 21, Lydia made up lies about her. Everyone blamed Meryl for kidnapping Lydia and trying to hurt

her.

Her parents had had it with her. They said, "Look, Lydia might not be our real kid, but she's been with us forever. She's our daughter! We brought you back and gave you this fancy life. What more do you want?"

"Meryl, how could you do this to Lydia? She's got class. You're nothing like her."

They didn't even let her explain. Just sent her to jail without thinking twice.

They never believed her. Not once!

Even her fiancé turned on her, declaring her guilty!

Dalton's eyes stayed on Meryl. Seeing her still frozen in place, he snapped, "Get in the car!"

Chapter 1 Be Released

3/5

His eyes drifted to her legs, spotting a gruesome scar around her ankle. It looked like it had been slashed with a sharp object, an **ugly** reminder of **her** suffering.

He turned away and called, "Elias."

His assistant, Elias Sterling, got out of the driver's seat and approached her. "Ms. Stone, Mr. Aniston wants you **to** get in the

car."

When Meryl still didn't move, Elias reached out to pull her.

Instinctively, Meryl crouched down, covering her head, her voice breaking. "No, please don't hit me..."

Elias was stunned by her reaction. She had changed so much that he barely recognized her at first. She used to be so vibrant. and full of life, known for her beauty. Now, the light in her eyes was gone, replaced by fear and dread.

Three years in prison had turned her into a shadow of her former self.

Elias instinctively glanced back at Dalton, but his face remained calm and indifferent.

“Meryl, I won’t wait for anyone. Three years **in** prison, and you still haven’t learned your lesson?”

Meryl slowly got up and slid into the car, carefully keeping her distance from him.

Chapter 1 Be Released

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The heater was on, but she huddled in a corner, still shivering from the rain and cold. Her head felt foggy, and despite trying to hold it in, she sneezed..

Suddenly, the car hit a speed bump, causing Meryl to lurch forward and fall to her knees.

Dalton, who had been resting with his eyes closed, snapped them open at the sound.

He glanced at her, his voice dripping with disdain. “Meryl, you really are a mess.”

She took a deep breath, his words making her feel even smaller. The car mat felt scorching under her, and she fidgeted uncomfortably.

“Sorry, I’ll clean it up later,” she whispered.

Dalton cut her off abruptly, “No need. It should get tossed.”

A bitter thought crossed Meryl’s mind. “Is it because I touched it?” Her lips trembled, a hint of bitterness showing **on** her face.

She turned to look out the window, her eyes turning red.

To Dalton, everything she touched was dirty and had to get tossed.

“In your eyes, only Lydia is clean, right?”

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Dalton's face tightened, anger flashing. "How dare you mention her? Remember! If you hurt Lydia again, prison won't be your only lesson!"

Secret Admirer Finding True Love After Prison

Secret Admirer: Finding True Love After ...

Chapter 2 The Harsh Truth

Meryl's face went pale, her eyes losing their sparkle. Those hellish three years should have taught her something.

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She took a deep breath, trying to control the storm of emotions. Inside her, her fingers curled into fists.

As the car passed under a bridge, the shifting light cast shadows on Dalton's face, highlighting his unchanged coldness.

Swallowing her bitterness, Meryl asked, "Dalton... Did you pay off those people in prison, asking them to bully me?"

In prison, she had broken down many times, even thinking about ending it all.

But she couldn't let go of Dalton. She was scared he wouldn't manage without her.

She couldn't believe he could be so cruel to her.

Dalton's response was chillingly calm. "What do you expect me to say?"

Meryl froze for a moment, then a wry smile crossed her lips.

Was this his way of confirming it?

To him, she was just a jealous woman and had arranged for

Chapter 2 The Harsh Truth

Lydia's kidnapping, leading to Lydia almost being assaulted.

The evidence had been plenty, leaving Meryl with no defense.

2/5

Lydia was ruthless enough to risk her own reputation, and she

Won.

Meryl suddenly felt that her love of seven years were utterly laughable.

Her gaze grew empty as the car pulled up to what had once been her and Dalton's home.

Meryl had overseen every detail of the house, from the major renovations to the placement of flower pots. She had even helped with the painting.

She had spent countless days and nights dreaming of a life there with Dalton.

But now, the house was filled with Lydia's belongings.

Meryl's heart felt like it was being pierced by needles. Her lips turned pale from how hard she was biting them, her heart frozen solid.

Dalton ignored her distress. He told the maid: "She's filthy. Get her cleaned up."

The maid nodded and led Meryl to the bathroom.

Inside, the maid wrinkled her nose and said, "Miss, when was

Chapter 2 The Harsh Truth

the last time you bathed? You should take better care of yourself."

3/5

She would smell nice if she wasn't getting bullied in prison for years. But Meryl didn't say a word.

After sending the maid away, she locked herself in the bathroom. and scrubbed her skin for an hour.

The wounds from her prison days still haunted her.

During her three years in prison, she endured relentless abuse. Though the last month had brought some relief, her old injuries hadn't healed.

Many were hidden, ranging from bruises and scratches to long, jagged scars.

The prison offered no proper care, and untreated injuries had festered. The worst was a deep scar on her left foot, which throbbed with each rainstorm, reminding her of the old pain.

Whenever the pain became too much, Meryl would keep telling herself that the agony would eventually fade.

When she came out of the shower, she slipped into the fresh clothes the maid had left, which fit her surprisingly well.

But as soon as she opened the bathroom door, she walked straight into Dalton.

She stumbled, nearly falling backward.

Chapter 2 The Harsh Truth

Dalton's hand shot out to steady her, wrapping around her waist.

4/5

The touch was jarring for both of them.

Meryl's heart raced as she found herself pressed against his chest, the heavy scent of nicotine wafting from him.

Quickly regaining her composure, she pulled away, creating some distance.

She tried to sound composed as she said, "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to..."

Meryl noticed the cigarette in Dalton's hand and figured he must have been heading out for a smoke when their paths crossed.

"What did you call me?" Dalton's eyes narrowed. "What's your game this time, Meryl?"

She bit her lip, her eyes stinging with tears she struggled to hold back.

It seemed that in his eyes, no matter what she did, it was always wrong.

Dalton's expression darkened as he put the cigarette back in his mouth.

He didn't want to admit that her sudden departure from his embrace had left him feeling unexpectedly hollow.

Chapter 2 The Harsh Truth

5/5

And seeing her tearful eyes stirred a primal impulse within him, a desire to lash out.

He lit the cigarette with a flicker of impatience, his throat tightening as he suppressed the urge inside. "So, after three years, you've only gotten better at seducing men?"

A sardonic smile played at his lips. "Can't wait, huh?"

Chapter 3 Silent Whispers

Meryl struggled to catch her breath, gripping the edges of her sleeves as if they might keep her grounded.

1/5

Why did he have to not only reject her but also humiliate her?

After a moment, she steadied herself, looked up at Dalton, and forced a smile. "Dalton, just because I have feelings for you doesn't mean you can belittle me."

Dalton was momentarily taken aback by her smile, a rare sight these days.

He found himself staring at her longer than he meant to, but by the time he realized it, Meryl had already looked away.

He loosened his tie and stubbed out his cigarette, acknowledging that Meryl had changed.

Though he wouldn't admit it, she wasn't the same woman who used to **light** up a room with her smile.

It was as if her spirit had withered away.

It didn't affect him directly, but it stirred an unsettling discomfort within him.

Dalton couldn't quite figure out what was bothering him.

Chapter 3 Silent Whispers

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Shaking off the confusion, he reminded her, “Today is Lydia’s birthday. I’ll take you back to the Stone Villa later, but remember to behave. Don’t cause trouble. Lydia is nothing like you.”

Meryl’s heart sank at his words.

To Dalton, Lydia was a cherished prize, while she was deemed unworthy even as a mere accessory.

An hour later, Meryl was ushered into a car by Elias.

At the Stone Villa, the grand hall

grand hall was filled with guests.

Even though Lydia wasn’t

biological

daughter, her

birthdays were always celebrated with great fanfare.

It was a show of the Stone family’s status and their support for her, subtly reinforcing her position.

Everyone of importance in Kingsdom had been invited.

The hall was abuzz with wealthy women discussing the latest high–society gossip.

“Why is Lydia so favored when she isn’t even Mr. Stone’s biological daughter? Is there something we don’t know?” someone wondered aloud.

“She has the skills and talent. In our circle, that’s what really matters. Bloodlines are secondary to the benefits you bring.”

Chapter 3 Silent Whispers

3/5

Another socialite nodded in agreement. “I heard Lydia has already closed several major deals within six months of joining the company. Mr. Stone was so impressed that he promoted her to vice president, clearly grooming her as a successor.

“But she’s still an outsider. Isn’t that like giving the company

away? What about her parents? Why isn't she with them?"

rea

"No one knows where her biological parents are," came the response **from** someone in the know. "It's odd because Camille Foster, who adopted Meryl, was supposed to be Lydia's mother, but their paternity test proved otherwise."

Meryl clenched her fists as she overheard the conversation.

She still couldn't wrap her head around why Lydia and Camille weren't biologically related.

She had thought Camille switched them to give Lydia a better life, but it turned out Lydia wasn't even her child.

No one knew the full story, but the outcome was clear.

Meryl was sent back to the Stone family, while Lydia's origins stayed a mystery.

Lydia had been with the Stone family for over twenty years, and the Stones treated her as well, if not better, than their own child.

As a few socialites chatted, their eyes subtly drifted toward Meryl.

Chapter 3 Silent Whispers

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Noticing their stares, Meryl lowered her head and quickly left the hall.

Just after she left, one of the women turned to the others and said, "Didn't that woman who just walked by look a bit like Meryl?"

The others followed her gaze.

"Meryl? No way. She was known for her striking beauty and figure. The woman who just passed by looked like a skeleton. Are you kidding?"

In the past, Meryl was the kind of person who stood out even in a crowd of beauties.

Now, though, she was almost unrecognizable...

Unaware she had become the topic of conversation, Meryl reached the second floor and was about to open her room's door when she overheard voices that made her freeze.

“Dalton, I heard Meryl’s out of prison. Is that true?”

“Meryl? The one who used to be glued to Dalton? When did she end up in prison? What did she do?”

The Stone family had worked hard to keep the scandal quiet. The official story was that Meryl had been studying abroad, thanks to Malcolm’s efforts to cover up the truth.

Dalton shot a frosty glance at Billy Preston, who immediately

Chapter 3 Silent Whispers realized his mistake.

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He slapped his forehead and tried to smooth things over. “Oops, I got that wrong. Meryl was abroad, not in prison.”

A wealthy young man who had been listening took a drag from his cigarette and commented, “Billy, you’re really losing it.”

Billy chuckled nervously. “Oh, come on. Everyone makes mistakes.”

The young man shifted the conversation back. “With Meryl back, things must be heating up around Dalton, right? If I remember correctly, you two were engaged three years ago. Dalton, any plans for a wedding?”

Meryl hesitated, her hand frozen on the door handle.

Inside, the sounds of a card game were audible.

Billy smiled jokingly, “Engaged? Come on. Marriage is just a way to keep someone under control. Dalton isn’t the type to be tied down by something like that.”

B

Chapter 4 Trophy Wife

The other guy laughed. “But Meryl’s a real knockout, isn’t she? With that face and figure, she’d turn heads anywhere. Keeping her around as a trophy wife wouldn’t be so bad.”

He glanced at Dalton, tossing a card onto the table. “Dalton, you really okay with letting someone else have her?”

are

Dalton finally spoke, his tone flat and uninterested. “You want her? She’s yours.”

The **guy** was taken aback, unsure if Dalton was serious or just messing with him, and chuckled awkwardly.

“Everyone knows Meryl’s been devoted to you. She’s followed you around all these years. I guess I’m not that lucky.”

Outside the door, Meryl was stunned, her face twisting into a bitter smile.

It was well known that she loved Dalton, but hearing him casually offer her up like a prize was a painful blow.

The sting of humiliation made her eyes well up. She clenched her fists tightly, feeling overwhelmed by a suffocating sense of betrayal.

She remembered being fourteen, new to the city from a small town.

Chapter 4 Trophy Wife

Her dad, Malcolm Stone, had put her **in** an elite school.

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It was supposed to be a fresh start, but Lydia Stone’s schemes ruined it fast.

One day, during a brutal snowstorm, they locked Meryl **in** an outdoor bathroom stall.

She was freezing and terrified. She screamed for help until she lost her voice, but no one came.

Then, Dalton kicked the door open.

She could still picture it clear as day. It was freezing cold, and there he was, with the blizzard raging behind him.

His unbuttoned uniform flapped **in** the wind, wet hair sticking to his forehead.

In the dim light, she couldn’t see his face clearly, but she remembered him taking off his scarf and tossing it to her.

“Here, take this,” he said, turning away without looking back.

To fourteen-year-old Meryl, seventeen-year-old Dalton was a hero, her first beacon of hope.

From that moment, she had loved him deeply, chasing him for seven years.

But now, she was just something he could give away.

Chapter 4 Trophy Wife

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As the phone rang, someone called out to her from behind.

“Meryl? You’re back?”

She glanced at her phone, ended the call, and turned to see who it was.

Her mother, Bianca Stone, looked surprised and approached with a skeptical expression. “When did you get out?”

How ridiculous.

Bianca remembered *Lyd*

birthday but forgot Meryl’s release.

“You’ve lost so much weight,” she said, frowning as she looked Meryl over. “A little hardship can be good for you. It teaches you lessons. Your father and I won’t hold the past against you. Today’s both your and your sister’s birthday. Change into a dress quickly.”

Then, as if remembering something, she added, “Oh, right. Since you’ve been gone for three years, your room is now a game room. Change in your sister’s room for now. I’ll have someone bring the clothes to you.”

Meryl was pushed into Lydia's room. The moment she stepped inside, the strong perfume made her stomach churn.

Chapter 4 Trophy Wife

She rushed to the bathroom, trying not to gag.

4/5

Just then, the sound of footsteps outside the door signaled the maid's arrival with the dress.

Meryl leaned over the sink, her eyes red from vomiting. Once the nausea passed, she washed her face and went back to the

room.

The maid was waiting inside, eyeing Meryl up and down as she

came out.

"I'm not pregnant," Meryl said, knowing what the maid was thinking. She had been so sick that her eyes were still bloodshot, making her look extremely weak. "Tell Lydia not to make a fuss about this."

The maid gave a somewhat ruffled smile. "Don't

misunderstand. I wasn't thinking that. Just get dressed and come downstairs quickly. Mrs. Stone is waiting for you."

Meryl knew the birthday party was for Lydia, and she was just an afterthought.

Not wanting to fake sisterly affection with Lydia while feeling nauseous, she went to the kitchen to get some food.

She had barely eaten a few bites when someone knocked on the door.

It was the same maid. "Mrs. Stone needs to see you. Miss, please come downstairs!"

Chapter 4 Trophy Wife

Meryl took her time finishing her last bite before looking up. "I'm not feeling well. I don't want to go downstairs."

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The maid was taken aback, clearly not expecting Meryl to refuse. “Madam said it’s not appropriate for you to miss today’s event. It would look bad if you and Ms. Lydia Stone aren’t seen together.”

“When have Lydia and I ever been on good terms?”

The maid was momentarily speechless, but fortunately, Meryl had already gotten up and was heading out.

In the grand hall, Lydia, dressed to **the** nines, was surrounded by a group of wealthy young ladies. She held a glass of white wine, about to take a sip when a sudden, startling voice interrupted.

“Ms. Lydia Stone, don’t drink that wine! It’s been tampered with!”

B

Chapter 5 Framing Her Again

“What?”

Lydia looked up, startled. “What do you mean?”

1/4

The maid glanced at Meryl. “I saw Ms. Stone go into the kitchen and put something in your drink. It looked like a drug.”

Several faces turned pale as the maid’s words sank **in**.

Everyone in the Stone family remembered the kidnapping incident three years ago. Lydia had been taken after drinking **a** spiked beverage.

Hearing that it might be happening again made Lydia’s face go white, and her hand shook, causing her wine glass to shatter on the floor.

The crash of the glass drew attention from the crowd, who now looked over curiously.

Lydia, with red-rimmed eyes, turned to Bianca. “Mom...

“I’m so scared...”

Bianca, realizing what Lydia feared, quickly comforted her. “Don’t be afraid. It’s all in the past.”

Then, she turned her gaze towards Meryl, her expression

Chapter 5 Framing Her Again

hardened. “Still up to your old tricks?”

2/4

Though Bianca didn't directly accuse Meryl in front of everyone, Meryl knew exactly what she meant.

It seemed Lydia was trying to use this situation to frame her again.

Meryl, who had been holding back laughter at the absurdity, spoke up. “It wasn't me.”

She glanced at the drink in the decanter. Lydia had a special preference for white wine, which had been prepared just for her. It was clear Lydia had anticipated this.

“I did go to the kitchen, but I was just looking for something to eat, not to mess with her drink.”

The maid persisted, “But I saw you add something to it. I swear I'm not lying!”

The maid's certainty was almost theatrical, like a crusader standing up to a powerful foe

Around them, murmurs and whispers began to circulate among the guests.

Bianca was anxious to keep the matter contained, knowing that family issues should be handled privately. Publicizing them would only bring embarrassment.

Lydia, sensing her mother's uncase, gave her a reassuring smile.

Chapter 5 Framing Her Again

“Mom, I think there's been a misunderstanding.

3/4

“Meryl has spent three years in prison. She wouldn't make the same mistake again. I trust she is innocent.”

Her words caused a stir as the guests had been led to believe that Meryl was studying a broad.

In their high-society circles, the mention of prison was a serious blemish, a mark that could affect one's reputation and even that of their family for generations.

The room buzzed with whispers.

Lydia realized she had slipped up and quickly tried to cover it, her face full of guilt. "I was just drunk and rambling. Don't take it seriously. How could my sister have ever been in prison?"

But her attempt to backtrack only made things worse.

Her obvious discomfort made it clear to everyone that there was some truth to the claim.

Trying to fix the situation, Lydia said, "Meryl, since you've just come back from abroad, have you adjusted to the time difference? Today is our birthday, and I've got a special gift for you. Want to see it?"

Meanwhile, the noise from downstairs reached Dalton, who came down to find Lydia looking fragile and upset, apologizing to Meryl in a pitiful way.

Chapter 5 Framing Her Again

4/4

Her eyes were red, her hands nervously clasped as she watched Meryl's reaction.

Meryl turned to look at her.

This was nothing new. Lydia always had a knack for playing the innocent victim, no matter how many times she tried to frame her.

Meryl felt cornered, the crowd's stares making her feel more exposed.

She hadn't done anything wrong, yet she was being unfairly accused and manipulated by Lydia.

It seemed that for Lydia, three years in prison wasn't enough.

Exposing Meryl's imprisonment was meant to ruin her life.

Meryl's frustration grew. If Lydia wanted to drag her down, maybe **it** was time to bring everyone down together!

B

Chapter 6 Raking up the Past

"Yeah, I did time." Meryl's eyes scanned the crowd, finally landing on Lydia.

1/5

Lydia reached out to grab her hand. "Meryl, stop saying that. I just spoke without thinking, okay?"

Meryl pulled back, avoiding Lydia's touch, yanking her hand away.

Suddenly, Lydia stepped on the hem of her dress and fell to the ground.

The fall was hard, and shards from a broken glass on the floor hadn't been cleaned up yet.

Dalton immediately rushed over, pushing through the crowd to help Lydia up.

Her hand was a bloody mess, with shards embedded in her skin.

Dalton's eyes blazed with anger as **he** glared at Meryl. "Meryl, you never learn! I warned you..."

Meryl's heart skipped a beat. She knew Dalton didn't care about her, but seeing him protect another woman still hurt.

"What did I do? I just pulled my hand away. She fell on her own."

Chapter 6 Raking up the Past

2/5

Seeing their hands clasped together, Meryl felt a pang of irony. She lowered her gaze, gently touching a spot on her chest where a pendant hung, a gift from someone long ago.

In prison, during countless moments of despair, she had clung to that pendant to get through it.

When she looked up again, her eyes were cold.

She smiled bitterly and continued, "Yeah, I was in prison, but I was framed."

Bianca's face turned pale as Meryl told her imprisonment.

Initially, when Lydia exposed Meryl's past, Bianca also suspected it was intentional.

But watching Lydia apologize and try to cover it up, she believed. it was just a slip of the tongue.

She had watched Lydia grow up and couldn't believe she had such malicious intentions.

Not wanting things to get out of hand, Bianca tried to smooth things over. "Meryl, you've had too much to drink. Let them help you upstairs to sober up."

But Meryl ignored her, her voice steady.

"Three years ago, if I had really kidnapped Lydia, I could have made her disappear with out a trace. Why would I leave evidence

Chapter 6 Raking up the Past for you to find her?"

Suddenly, a sharp slap echoed through the room.

Malcolm had emerged from **his** study, his face stern.

"Meryl, stop this nonsense right now!" he commanded.

Her cheek stung, but Meryl didn't flinch.

3/5

"Lydia only had minor injuries. If those men really wanted to hurt her, they would have d one it when they first grabbed her. Why take her to **an** abandoned factory? It doesn't ad d up."

The crowd was stunned, eyes widening in disbelief.

Whispers spread through the room as people glanced at Lydia, who bit her lip, her face pale.

Malcolm was furious. This incident had been a forbidden topic. in the Stone family for ye ars. Now, Meryl was airing their dirty laundry in front of everyone, turning them into a sp ectacle.

His one daughter ended up in prison, and the other was nearly assaulted all because of a bitter feud between sisters. It was the kind of scandal that made for juicy gossip in hig h society.

Tears streamed down Lydia's face, her shoulders trembling **as** she sobbed quietly.

Meryl let out a cold laugh, thinking, "Can't handle this, can you?"

Chapter 6 Raking up the Past

Compared to her own suffering, this was nothing.

4/5

Bianca shot Meryl a warning look, urging her to be quiet. Three years ago, they had agreed to send Meryl to prison to teach her a lesson because she had refused to admit her mistake, and they thought she was beyond help.

Bianca sometimes wondered if they had been too harsh. After all, Meryl was their daughter.

But Lydia had insisted that being a Stone family member would protect her in prison. They believed this might be the only way to set Meryl straight, fearing she would otherwise go down the wrong path.

Bianca had reluctantly agreed.

Meryl had been raised by Camille, who had also raised a gambling, lazy son.

With that kind of upbringing, Meryl needed some serious correction to set her on the right path.

“Why bring this up now?” Bianca’s voice was full of frustration. “Can’t you see Lydia is crying?”

Meryl’s expression turned mocking. “Right, I went to prison for her, and she’s the one crying.”

She bent down, lifting the hem of her dress to reveal an ugly scar on her ankle, causing a collective gasp from the room.

Chapter 6 Raking up the Past “But who cares if I’m hurting?”

Meryl’s fingers traced the scar.

5/5

The damp weather made it ache slightly, but she was used to it.

“I’ve always wondered who paid off those inmates to treat me like that. I have dozens of scars. Want to see?”

They had claimed it was Dalton, but Meryl didn’t believe it. She wanted to know, in front of everyone, who was truly responsible.

The sight of her scar made the daughters of the wealthy families present feel a pang of sympathy. They had been pampered their whole lives and had never suffered like this.

“Was it you?” Meryl looked at Malcolm and Bianca, then quickly shifted her gaze to Lydia. “Or you?”

Finally, her eyes locked on Dalton.

Chapter 7 Falling Apart

When Dalton saw Meryl show her scar to everyone, a strange feeling stirred inside him.

ΠΕ

Seeing her act like she didn't care about him anymore broke his heart.

For years, Meryl had devoted herself to him, loving him without conditions.

He had gotten used to it, taking her love for granted.

“Meryl, please stop. If it means that much to you, I'll give you my position.” Lydia's hands shook as she covered her head.

“It's **all** my fault. I shouldn't have stayed with the Stone family. I should have died the day I was kidnapped three years ago.”

“But your suffering in prison has nothing to do with me **or** our parents. Prison is full of bad people. You were bullied because you ended up there.”

Tears filled Lydia's eyes, but she held them back.

“Dalton, you shouldn't have saved me. I would have been better off dead.”

With a few words, she washed her hands of any responsibility for Meryl's ordeal in prison.

Chapter 7 Falling Apart

2/4

Meryl's gaze was cold. “People who really want to die don't just talk about it.”

“Meryl!”

Dalton's face was tense as he shielded Lydia, patting her hand reassuringly before turning to Meryl. "I told you to behave. Do you realize the consequences of your actions today?"

Meryl's lips twisted into a bitter smile.

She had bared her deepest wound, and to him, it was just her causing trouble.

"Yes, I'm making a scene. But you're my fiancé. Aren't you supposed to stand by me? Dalton, how can you defend another woman in front of me?"

Her words made everyone realize what was happening.

From the beginning, Dalton had been siding with Lydia.

For the past three years, rumors had been swirling, hinting at something off.

Recently, whenever Aniston Group was bidding on a project, Stone Group's proposals seemed to pop up everywhere, with Lydia handling most of them.

In the business world, such encounters weren't unusual, but the frequency with which these two appeared together was striking.

Chapter 7 Falling Apart

Since Lydia and Meryl were sisters, no one gave **it** too much thought. High society valued appearances and dismissed **any** scandal as too outrageous to be true.

But Meryl's words made people start connecting the dots.

3/4

The idea that something might be going **on** between Dalton and Lydia, though it sounded like a plot twist from a soap opera, was

exactly the kind of scandal that intrigued the wealthy socialites. exactly the kind of scandal that in

In the world of the rich, gossip was common, but fresh, juicy gossip about the Aniston and Stone families was a rare find.

Meryl gave Lydia a wry smile. "I'm already a Stone by blood. Do I really need you to give me the title?"

Her smile was bitter, and her eyes were red-rimmed.

All the emotions she'd been holding back suddenly burst out. She marched over to the decanter, grabbed **it**, and said, "So you think I drugged you?"

Taking a deep gulp from the bottle, she went on, "Fine, if I did, I'm drinking it myself. Happy now?"

The sharp taste hit her senses, and the liquid spilled from her lips onto her dress.

She took another swig and then threw the decanter at Lydia..

The sound of shattering glass filled the room as pieces scattered

Chapter 7 Falling Apart across the floor.

At that moment, Meryl was falling apart completely...

B

Write your comment

Chapter 8 Canceling the Engagement

Just then, Meryl's phone buzzed, but it was on silent.

She missed three calls without even realizing it.

Bianca noticed and went pale.

Watching Meryl gulp down the drink, she feared it might be poisoned and that Meryl could collapse right there.

Frantic, Bianca told someone to call an ambulance.

1/4

At that moment, a servant from the kitchen came **out**, saying, "I added something to Ms. Lydia Stone's drink. She said she wasn't feeling well, so I put in some vitamins."

The servant looked a lot like Meryl, and everyone realized there had been a huge misunderstanding.

But the drama was far from over.

Meryl suddenly grabbed Lydia's wrist and dragged her towards.

the stairs.

Her behavior was erratic, almost as **if** she had lost her mind.

Lydia tried to pull away, but seeing Dalton chasing after them,

Chapter 8 Canceling the Engagement

she came up with an idea and followed Meryl up the stairs.

2/4

“What are you doing? Meryl, if you want to lose it, do it alone! Let go!” Dalton shouted, grabbing Meryl and pulling her away.

His cold gaze swept over her.

Then, he froze.

He **saw** tears streaming down Meryl’s face.

A sudden pang of uncertainty hit him, quickly replaced by overwhelming shock.

In the chaos at the top of the stairs, as Meryl and Lydia struggled, Meryl’s body suddenly pitched forward and began to fall down the stairs.

She was so light that even a small push sent her tumbling.

Dalton had a chance to catch her, but just as he reached out, Lydia cried out.

His focus shifted to her, and by the time he turned back, it was too late.

Meryl’s injured ankle made it impossible for her to steady herself.

In that moment, as Dalton chose to protect Lydia, Meryl’s heart sank.

Chapter 8 Canceling the Engagement

The fall was brutal. She collided with the metal railings, each impact making her head throb painfully.

Yet, she clenched her teeth and stayed silent.

She felt she deserved this.

Falling for Dalton had been her mistake, and now she was paying the price.

As she fell, a grim clarity hit her.

3/4

The crowd went wild, scrambling to call an ambulance as they watched Meryl on the floor, struggling to get up.

Bianca rushed over in a panic, trying to help, but Meryl gently pushed her away.

After a moment to gather herself, Meryl slowly stood up.

Her head was still spinning, but she stayed silent, bearing the pain quietly.

This kind of pain was nothing new to her. After three years **in** prison, she had learned to endure it in silence.

Her gaze, once warm and loving, now had a cold detachment, as if she were looking at a stranger.

Dalton noticed the change but didn't think much of it.

He assumed her coldness was just a reaction to his failure to

Chapter 8 Canceling the Engagement catch her and that **she** would soon calm down.

She had always been strong and never needed much comfort.

The unpleasant scene abruptly ended the birthday party.

After the last guest left, Meryl took a deep breath, her tears falling before she could even speak.

"I'm breaking off the engagement."

There was a stunned silence as Malcolm and Bianca tried to process her words.

4/4

"What did you just say?" Malcolm asked, disbelief in his voice.

Meryl, gripping her hands tightly, forced herself to speak. "I'm calling off the engagement with Dalton. He and Lydia seem to fit each other better. I'm stepping aside."

Malcolm's face twisted with frustration. "Meryl, have you lost your mind? You can't just cancel the engagement like that! Do you think you can just walk away from this?"

Chapter 9 Her Call

Malcolm's face darkened as he drummed his fingers on the table, the sound echoing ominously through the room.

1/5

He couldn't believe that Meryl, who had dedicated so much of her life to Dalton, would now so easily call off the engagement.

"Is this about Lydia? They've just been working together more closely lately. Is that really worth **all** this drama?"

Bianca quickly backed him up. "Do you really think so little of Lydia? She's always been nice to you. Why would she try to take Dalton from you?"

Meryl's gaze swept over her parents and then landed on Lydia.

It was all so bitterly ironic.

Lydia didn't need to lift a finger. Her parents were always ready to speak for her.

And yet, Meryl was the one they should have been defending.

A sardonic smile played on Meryl's lips.

"I'm not joking or being petty. I'm ending things with Dalton. It's over."

Dalton, clearly frustrated, tugged at his tie. "What now, Meryl?"

Chapter 9 Her Call

"What's this all about?"

Meryl's laugh was hollow.

"You think I'm just throwing a tantrum?"

2/5

"Dalton, do you think that just because I love you, I'm beneath you? Do you believe I'm not allowed to feel hurt?"

"You can't see my pain, so you assume I'm just making a fuss?"

“I’ve been wanting to ask you for a while now. When you ditch your fiancée to protect another woman, did you ever think about how I’d feel?”

“And how could you so casually cast me aside?”

The thought of what Dalton had said to his friends earlier made Meryl’s heart sink further.

Dalton’s expression shifted as he realized that Meryl’s outburst was a reaction to what she had overheard.

Her anger was a direct result of his careless words.

He laughed, though the sound was bitter. “It was just a joke among friends. Is that all it takes to upset you?”

Lydia, sensing things were spiraling, interjected, “Meryl, this isn’t the time for this. Your tantrum will only make things harder for Mom and Dad. Canceling the engagement like this just makes us look ridiculous.”

Chapter 9 Her Call

3/5

“This family is already a joke. I’ve never seen a daughter treated

so

poorly by her own family. And you’re worried about how we look to outsiders?”

Malcolm, his anger boiling over, slapped Meryl hard across the face.

His chest heaved as he glared at her. “You’re being utterly unreasonable!”

The slap made Meryl’s vision blur and her head spin even more from the fall.

The burning pain in her cheek was intense, but she held back her tears.

“You think breaking off the engagement means anyone would still want you? Who would risk angering the Aniston family just to marry you?”

“And let’s not forget, your prison record will be public knowledge tomorrow.”

“You’ve made a fool of this family!”

“Yes, I’ve been to prison, but I was framed! Just because Lydia was behind it, you all choose to believe her!”

Meryl was done with her family. She couldn’t stand to be around them anymore.

Chapter 9 Her Call

As she turned to leave, the heavy rain poured down in sheets.

4/5

A maid, seeing her determination, offered her an umbrella, but Meryl just shook her head and walked straight into the storm.

She finally understood that her so-called family and lover were nothing more than illusions.

The rain soaked her through, but she felt strangely free.

It was like she was washing away all the hurt and pretense.

Unbeknownst to her, not far away, a sleek black car was parked by the roadside.

Inside, a man in a white shirt smoked a cigarette, the ember glowing faintly in the dim light.

He exhaled a cloud of smoke, his gaze fixed on his phone.

A moment later, a man in a suit, presumably an assistant, approached the car.

There was a brief silence before the assistant, Walter Adams, spoke softly.

Chandler Aniston, seated in the back, suddenly looked more alert.

“So, this is what happened tonight,” Walter explained, clearly puzzled by the night’s events.

Chapter 9 Her Call

5/5

He couldn’t believe how the real daughter had been mistreated by a fake, with not a single family member stepping up for her.

He couldn’t help but wonder, “What is wrong with these people?”

“Are they out of their minds?”

Walter glanced at Chandler’s impassive face, then at Meryl’s fading figure in the distance, and asked, “Should we follow her?”

Chandler’s attention was on his phone, which had just lit up.

The dim light illuminated his chiseled features, and his expression shifted from detached to curious as the phone rang.

With a slight smile, he quickly picked up the call.

“258, is that you?” Meryl’s hesitant voice came through the phone.

Chapter 10 Dalton’s Uncle

After Meryl left, the mood in the Stone Villa turned awkward.

She had been the one pushing for the engagement with Dalton, and now she was suddenly calling it off.

The family exchanged confused looks, shocked by the sudden change. No one could believe that Meryl, usually so easygoing, left without even looking at Dalton.

Breaking the silence, Lydia tried to calm her parents. “Mom, Dad, please, don’t be mad. Meryl’s been through a lot in prison. She’s confused and upset. She’s not thinking straight...”

“Confused? She’s 24!” Malcolm fumed, slamming his fist on the table.

“She’s old enough to know what she’s doing! Does she think she can just call off the engagement on a whim? What will people think? That there’s something between you and Dalton?”

“So inconsiderate!”

Lydia bowed her head, tears welling up in her eyes. “If it makes Meryl happy, I can take the blame. I don’t care about the gossip.”

Bianca, feeling a pang of sympathy, rubbed her shoulder gently. “Your reputation matters. If you marry Dalton now, what will

Chapter 10 Dalton’s Uncle

people say?”

Lydia bit her lip, her hands clasped tightly in front of her.

She glanced at Dalton, who sat silently **on** the sofa, a cigarette between his fingers, his expression unreadable through the smoke.

Something was off about him.

2/5

Feeling a rising anxiety, Lydia was about to speak to him when he abruptly stubbed out his cigarette and stood up.

“I’m leaving.”

Malcolm and Bianca exchanged worried looks and quickly signaled Lydia.

She nodded and hurried after Dalton. “It’s raining. Let me walk you out.”

As soon as they were out of earshot, Malcolm’s worry spilled over. “Do you think Dalton will call off the engagement? He looked furious when he left.”

10

The Aniston family was incredibly wealthy, and many would kill to align themselves with them.

Besides, Dalton was an important member of the family...

Being publicly jilted was a huge blow to his pride.

Chapter 10 **Dalton’s** Uncle

Bianca sighed. “Meryl has always been headstrong. But she’s always come around before.”

3/5

“Don’t worry. Young people fight and make up. She’ll realize her mistake and apologize to Dalton in a few days.”

Malcolm thought about it and nodded.

Over the years, they had all seen how deeply Meryl cared for

Dalton.

Even from prison, she never missed a week writing to him.

They had grown up together and shared seven years of memories. Feelings like that don't just disappear overnight.

So, Malcolm and Bianca convinced themselves she was just acting out of anger.

Lydia walked Dalton to the door and reached up to straighten his tie.

Halfway through, her eyes filled with tears as a thought hit her.

"It's all my fault," she said, tears streaming down her face.

"I told Meryl I wouldn't compete with her for **you**, but she still doesn't get **it**. Why does she keep causing trouble?"

"She's so spoiled and willful. She embarrassed you in front of

Chapter 10 Dalton's Uncle

everyone, and it's because of me."

4/5

Seeing her so upset, Dalton pulled out a tissue and gently wiped her tears. "Don't cry over her. She's not worth it."

Lydia tried to stifle her sobs, looking worried. "Don't... what if

someone sees us?"

"Dalton, I've always said that just being able to see you from a distance is enough for me. Someone like me doesn't deserve to be by your side."

Dalton instinctively reached for another cigarette.

Thinking of Meryl's sharp attitude, he found Lydia's softness even more appealing.

But coming from a prestigious family, the Anistons wouldn't accept someone with a questionable background, and Lydia's past was unclear...

Pof

Feeling a wave of tenderness, he kissed the top of her head. "Lydia, trust me, I won't let you suffer for nothing."

Just then, Dalton noticed a black car parked nearby out of the corner of his eye.

His heart sank, and he instinctively stepped away from Lydia, taking a few steps forward

.
It was his uncle, Chandler.