

# Secret Admiration Finding True Love After Prison

## Chapter 11 – 20

Chapter 11 Having a Concussion

The rain made it hard for Dalton to see clearly, and before he could make out the license plate, the car drove away.

Lydia caught up with him, umbrella **in** hand. “Dalton, what’s wrong?”

He turned back to her, and she quickly held the umbrella over him, leaving herself exposed to the rain.

**1/4**

In that moment, he saw a flash of Meryl’s old selflessness in her actions.

Meryl used to do such things, too.

Shaking his head, he thought, “Why am I thinking about Meryl? I don’t even love her.”

Seeing Lydia shivering, he took off his jacket and draped **it** over her shoulders.

“Do you think Meryl is really serious about calling off the engagement?” she asked quietly.

“Not a chance,” Dalton said, pulling her closer.

“Meryl’s just trying to get my attention. She can’t stay away from me for long.”

Chapter 11 Having a Concussion

**2/4**

“But she seemed so angry tonight,” Lydia murmured, biting her lip. “Maybe you should call her and see where she went?”

Dalton shook his head dismissively. “There’s no need. She’ll come around and apologize.”

He had never been the one to call Meryl first.

In their relationship, she was always the one to reach out, no matter who was at fault.

She was the one who always apologized, and he was used to it.

The weather was ominous and dark.

Thunder and lightning filled the sky, making it seem like it was being torn apart.

Walter stood by the bedside of the unconscious woman and spoke softly, "Ms. Stone has a concussion. The doctor said she might need to stay **in** the hospital for a few more days for

observation."

Chandler's jaw tightened as he kept his eyes on Meryl's ankle.

Walter glanced at it briefly, then continued, "Her ankle was cut by porcelain shards. The treatment was delayed, so the scar might be permanent, but the bone is fine."

Chandler's face was unreadable, but the cold aura around him

Chapter 11 Having a Concussion

was palpable.

**3/4**

Meryl lay there, looking frail and defeated. Though her soaked clothes had been changed, her **thin frame** looked lifeless.

The slap mark on her pale face was stark and unsettling.

It must **have** hurt a lot.

Chandler pulled out a cigarette and put it to his lips, but before lighting it, he decided against it, not wanting to affect Meryl.

"Mr. Paltrow is still waiting for you," Walter reminded him softly, checking the time. "If you don't go, they're leaving soon."

"Forget it. I'm not going."

Chandler sat down by the bed. "I'm staying here tonight."

Walter was about to say something when Chandler's phone rang.

He glanced at Meryl, who was restless in her sleep, and stepped into the hallway to take the call.

Dante Paltrow's voice boomed through the phone. "Chandler, what's the deal with you leaving without a word? People will think you got whisked away by a woman."

Chandler smirked. "Well, I did. Jealous?"

"What kind of dream are you living in?"

Chapter 11 Having a Concussion

**4/4**

Dante chuckled, teasing, "You really think that after a few years in the army, women are just gonna be throwing themselves at you? Get real, man."

Chandler remained silent, a cigarette hanging from his lips.

He and Dante had been friends since childhood, so Dante knew he could joke like this.

"Get over here, we're all waiting for you," Dante urged. "Oh, and your nephew's here too."

Chandler's eyes narrowed. "Dalton?"

"Yeah. The whole mess at the Stone Villa is all over the place. Your nephew's got nerves of steel, showing up here for a drink after all that."

A dark shadow crossed Chandler's face, his smile cold and devoid of humor.

"Wait for me. I'm coming right now."

Chapter 12 Unforgotten Rescue

Chandler had only just left when Meryl blinked awake, the strong scent of disinfectant filling her nostrils.

**1/4**

Everything around her was a blur of white, reminding her that she was in a hospital.

After she'd left the Stone Villa, the rain had come down in torrents. In her hazy state, she noticed a missed call on her phone and decided to call back.

Just as she told the caller her address, her head felt heavy, and she blacked out.

“So, that man sent me here?” she wondered.

Ten years ago, she had saved a man by accident.

In return, he gave her a pendant and a phone number, telling her she could call if she ever needed help.

Meryl had been doubtful but wrote the number down anyway, never imagining it would actually be useful.

After all these years, she figured he would have forgotten all about her.

But tonight, when she called, she did so without much hope, yet the call went through.

Chapter 12 Unforgotten Rescue

2/4

She couldn't recall what he looked like, only that he had worn a police uniform with the number “258” on his shoulder, probably his badge number.

Just as she was lost in her memories, the door swung open, pulling her back to reality.

A tall, handsome man in a sharp suit walked in. She turned, surprised by his striking looks.

Walter hadn't expected her to wake up so soon. “Ms. Stone, do you feel okay? Just a moment. I'll get the doctor.”

After a whirlwind of activity, a group of medical staff came in and then left just as quickly.

Watching them come and go made Meryl feel oddly surreal, yet she was comforted by the thought that someone cared about her.

Once the nurses had cleared out, she turned to Walter and said, “So it was you, 258? Thanks for tonight.”

That memory felt like it belonged to another lifetime. She was only fourteen then.

Now, after all these years, the details of that man's face were a blur in her mind.

Walter hesitated, surprise flickering in his eyes.

He didn't know what the number meant to Meryl, but he

## **Chapter 12** Unforgotten Rescue

guessed it had something to do with Chandler.

**3/4**

Not wanting to misstep, he replied cautiously, "Ms. Stone, are you looking for the person who helped you? He had to leave earlier, but I'm Walter. If you need anything, just let me know, and I'll handle it."

So it wasn't him.

Meryl nodded, and noticing she looked a bit exhausted, Walter gently closed the door as he left the room.

In the hallway, he quickly sent a message to Chandler. [Sir, Ms. Stone is awake, and the doctor says she's doing well.]

Chandler responded almost instantly. [Good.]

After a moment, Walter remembered something else and added. [Ms. Stone might want to see you.]

As Chandler arrived at the club, the rain was pouring heavily outside, but he strode in confidently, his clothes completely dry.

He glanced at his phone, the light reflecting off his sharp features as he read the message.

An eyebrow raised at Walter's message.

With his tall frame and an air of wild confidence, he looked striking under the dim lights.

His deep-set eyes had a teasing glimmer.

## **Chapter 12** Unforgotten Rescue

**4/4**

Chandler bit down on a cigarette hanging loosely from his lips and quickly typed back. [I'll be there soon.]

Just as he hit send, the playful smile faded from his face.

Inside the private room, the crowd that had been surrounding

Dalton shifted their focus to Chandler as he entered.

It was obvious that Chandler was entirely **on** another level when it came to status and influence.

Everyone in the room knew that he was the real force behind Galaxy Holdings Group.

Feeling a bit sheepish after being caught showing off, Dalton rubbed the back of his neck and walked over to Chandler. “Hey,

Uncle.”

### Chapter 13 Refusing His Request

Chandler ignored him and casually took the drink that Dante offered, swirling the dark red liquid in the glass between his fingers.

The drink reflected a strange light, adding to the tension in the air.

Dalton, remembering why he was here, steeled himself and said, “Uncle, about Celestial Ventures Group’s project...”

Recently, Galaxy Holdings Group had been bidding on a project, and Celestial Ventures Group was one of the competitors. Dalton had promised Lydia he would secure this project for her.

However, the contract had been sitting in Chandler’s office for half a month without being processed, which was why he had braved the heavy rain to come here.

Chandler shot Dalton a cold glance. “This is a club. We’re not discussing business here.”

Dalton had prepared a lot to say, but the words stuck in his throat.

Still thinking of Lydia’s request, he pressed on, “Uncle, it’s just about signing the contract...”

Before he could finish, Chandler suddenly slammed his glass

## Chapter 13 Refusing His Request

2/5

down on the table, shattering it into pieces. The abrupt sound silenced the room.

“Dalton, you really have some nerve,” Chandler said, his tone sharp.

Though he wasn't shouting, the atmosphere grew heavier.

Dalton felt a sinking feeling in his gut. He didn't interact with Chandler much and usually didn't have any conflicts of interest with him, but **tonight, it** was clear Chandler was furious.

“Don't forget you're part of Galaxy Holdings Group. Have you even looked into Celestial Ventures Group's qualifications? You just bring this to me without any verification?”

“I checked. They're fine,” Dalton replied, trying to sound confident.

“Really? Then explain why you'd pick Celestial Ventures Group over a better option?”

Caught off guard, Dalton stumbled over his words.

“Not comfortable answering? Let me help you out. It's because someone from Celestial Ventures Group is pulling your strings. Should I name names in front of everyone?”

Dalton's face paled. The crowd was filled with wealthy elites, many **of** whom he knew well and often relied **on** for support.

With just a few pointed remarks, Chandler had turned what

## Chapter 13 Refusing His Request

3/5

should have been a straightforward business conversation into a public humiliation.

Dalton felt his standing in the room crumbling, making it impossible for him to hold his head high among his peers again..

Dante, casually sipping his drink, quickly picked up on the tension in the room.

“So, Dalton, **are** you really here begging your uncle for your mistress? No wonder Meryl wants to call off the engagement. Who could put up with their partner being so openly involved with someone else?”

Mentioning the engagement made Dalton’s expression darken.

“Lydia isn’t a mistress!” he shot back, frustration evident in his voice.

Chandler let out a scoff, raising an eyebrow. “You’re having an affair. Isn’t she a mistress?”

Dalton hesitated, struggling to find a response.

It dawned on him that Chandler must have heard about the drama at the Stone family’s house earlier.

Typically, Chandler didn’t involve himself in family squabbles, but this was clearly about the family’s reputation.

Meryl’s public announcement to break off the engagement would undoubtedly tarnish the Aniston family’s image. As the

#### Chapter 13 Refusing His Request

head of the family, Chandler had to care about these things.

4/5

Dalton realized that confronting his uncle head-on wouldn’t do him any favors.

“Meryl just got upset tonight. She’ll cool down and come back in a couple of days. It’s nothing serious.”

Chandler took a drag from his cigarette, narrowing his eyes. “Is that so?”

His tone was loaded with meaning, but Dalton didn’t pick up on it.

“It’s just a little lovers’ spat. You really don’t need to worry, Uncle. Once she apologizes, everything will go back to normal.”

Hearing this, Chandler went quiet for a moment, considering his words.

That comment struck a nerve.



Meryl had indeed initiated the breakup tonight, but what if she changed her mind?

Could she really just walk away from seven years of feelings that easily?

After finishing his cigarette, Dalton finally spoke up again..

“You should bring Lydia here tomorrow at six.”

### Chapter 13 Refusing His Request

5/5

Dalton froze, confused about why Chandler suddenly wanted to see Lydia.

He felt a wave of concern, worried that Chandler might put her in a tough spot.

Dante chimed in, grinning. “You’re sticking up for her like that, but you’re saying she’s not involved? If your uncle wants you to bring her, just do it. You really don’t want to make him angry. Trust me, it won’t end well for you.”

### Chapter 14 How Embarrassing

1/5

Dalton had come to see Chandler for a signature, but instead of getting what he wanted, he ended up looking foolish.

He couldn’t take it anymore and left, looking defeated.

Dante, nursing his drink, noticed something and smirked. “Chandler, something’s definitely off with you tonight.”

Chandler chuckled lightly. “Oh? What makes you say that?”

Dante raised an eyebrow, clearly knowing more than he let on. “Come on, you know exactly what I mean.”

After Dalton left, Chandler decided he didn’t want to stay any longer. “I’m out of here.”

Dante was curious. “What’s got you leaving so early? What kind of woman has you this worked up?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Chandler said, crushing the cigarette. “I’d give her anything.”

“Wow, look at you, a real romantic,” Dante teased, crossing his

arms.

Leaning

closer, he whispered, "It's her, isn't it? That girl who saved you ten **years** ago. Meryl?"

Chapter **14** How Embarrassing

2/5

Chandler remained silent, merely shooting him a look.

Realizing he'd struck a chord, Dante continued with a grin, "What's the point of pining after her? While you were out being a border cop, she was with your nephew for seven years.

"If Dalton had any sense, they might be married by now."

Dante couldn't resist playing advisor. "If I were you, I'd jump on this opportunity while she's mad at him. If you swoop in while she's still upset, she might just marry you before she thinks **it** through!"

Chandler ignored him completely, stepping toward the door.

But he stopped and turned back. "Where's Anne?"

"She's at home. What's up?"

"Tell her to accompany Meryl in the hospital tomorrow. I'll text you the address later."

And just like that, Chandler was gone, leaving Dante feeling like

a messenger.

"Seriously? I'm **in** a fight with Anne. Why would I want to go home? You **think** I came out in this downpour **just** to be bored?"

Dante didn't want to head home, which was why he'd called his friends out to keep himself occupied.

He took another drink, and thoughts of Anne Blanchett made

Chapter **14** How Embarrassing his head spin.

3/5

The night before had been a deluge, but by morning, the rain had finally stopped.

Meryl woke up feeling groggy, vaguely aware that she had dreamt something but unable to grasp the details.

“Awake already?”

She jolted at the sudden voice and turned to find a man lounging on the other side of the bed.

He was propped up against **the** headboard, casually observing her with strikingly handsome eyes.

His white shirt was wrinkled, the top three buttons undone, revealing a hint of toned muscles beneath.

Meryl frowned, her mind racing with confusion. “What on earth happened?”

Chandler looked at her with a slight smirk. “You seem surprised. You don’t remember how I ended up in this bed, do you?”

Her fingers instinctively tightened around the blanket, suspicion flooding her.

“I don’t even know him! How did he get here?” she wondered.

Chapter **14** How Embarrassing

4/5

Chandler maintained a serious tone as he adjusted his shirt.

“You were the one who held onto me last night, not letting me leave. If anyone should be upset, it’s me.”

Meryl felt her mind go blank.

She recalled the doctor’s visit the night before and then just falling asleep.

There was a fuzzy memory of being enveloped in a warm embrace, but she couldn’t remember the specifics.

She looked back at him, still unsure. “You’re really sure I was the one who pulled you in?”

Chandler didn’t respond immediately, focusing instead on fixing his shirt.

When he reached the third button, his movements suddenly paused.

His eyes dropped to her right hand.

Following his gaze, she noticed that she was clutching the very button he had been trying to fasten.

Internally, she screamed, "I pulled this off? Oh no... how embarrassing!"

Despite **her** best efforts, she couldn't recall a single moment from the night.

## Chapter 15 Marry Me

Meryl looked down, biting her lip and glancing up at him nervously, trying to piece together what had happened.

Why was this man in her hospital room?

"Are you 258?" she ventured cautiously.

Chandler raised an eyebrow and took a seat, crossing his long legs. His deep eyes locked onto hers.

"Yes, that's me."

His voice was cool, carrying a hint of early morning huskiness.

"Ms. Stone, are you planning to use your favor from ten years ago to make up for last night?"

Their eyes met, and Meryl felt a bit lost.

Ten years ago, when she had saved him, he was covered **in** mud, lying behind a haystack with a frightening wound on his chest.

She hadn't expected that he would turn out to be so strikingly handsome.

She had always thought Dalton was the most handsome **man in** Kingsdom, but now she had to admit he didn't compare to the man in front of her.

## Chapter 15 Marry Me

Her fingers trembled slightly, and she asked in a small voice, "We didn't... do anything else, did we?"

Chandler's eyes twinkled with amusement. "What do you think?"

2/4

Meryl clutched the blanket, feeling anxious. Aside from pulling off his button, she couldn't be sure if she had done anything more inappropriate.

Feeling pressured, she knew she had to say something.

"How about I buy you a new shirt?"

Chandler's smile widened. "Replace my shirt?"

Meryl bit her lip.

That didn't seem quite sufficient.

He looked wealthy, surely not lacking a shirt or two.

But she couldn't think of anything else she could offer. Just having left the Stone family, she had nothing to her name.

After a brief silence, Meryl spoke softly, "If you have any requests, just let me know. I will..."

"Marry me."

Her words were cut off abruptly, leaving her stunned. "What?"

Chapter 15 Marry Me What did you say?"

Chandler leaned back, his eyes fixed on her lips, which were small and red like a blooming rose.

His Adam's apple bobbed slightly.

"I said, marry me. Think about it."

3/4

His tone was casual as if discussing lunch plans, but Meryl felt a shockwave pass through her.

"We've only met once. I don't even know your name!"

Chandler rubbed his forehead with his fingers, looking slightly exasperated. "Ms. Stone, you might not realize this, but I'm a traditional guy. I've saved myself for 29 years.

"But last night, **you** took my first time. How am I supposed to explain that to my future wife?"

He paused, leaning forward, a faint smile on his lips. "Besides, we haven't just met once. We've known each other for ten years. You saved my life. Marrying you makes perfect sense."

Meryl was at a loss for words.

It seemed like not getting married would be hard to justify.

"You might not know, but I have a fiancé."

She bit her lip and then, as if remembering something, lowered

Chapter 15 Marry Me

4/4

her eyes, her expression turning sad. "But last night, we broke off the engagement."

Chandler's hair was tousled by the wind as his gaze settled on her lowered lashes.

His hand clenched unconsciously, the veins **on** the back of his hand standing out.

The room fell into a quiet, almost somber silence, an unspoken tension hanging between them.

Then, there was a knock on the door.

A young nurse peeked in, holding a thermometer.

Chandler stood up, adjusting his tie. "If you make up your mind, let Walter know."

As he spoke, he walked over to the water dispenser, poured a cup of warm water, and placed it on the bedside table.

"Take care of yourself. I'll come back to see you."

Chapter 16 Nowhere to Go

Watching Chandler's tall figure fade into the distance, Meryl felt a wave of calm wash over her.

Yet, her mind couldn't help but drift back to Dalton.

How did everything go so wrong?

She remembered those early years after returning to the Stone family. The smell of gasoline made her nauseous, so Lydia rode while she walked home from school.

Sometimes, she would glance back and see Dalton following.

He always looked so aloof in his custom school uniform, hands in his pockets.

One day, she stopped and waited.

Dalton, with his long strides, quickly caught up.

He towered over her, his face indifferent, but his eyes gave away a hint of affection.

Back then, she was certain he cared for her.

Things changed during the school's centennial celebration.

Lydia was supposed to perform a piano duet with Dalton.

Chapter 16 Nowhere to Go

**2/5**

Just before they went on stage, Lydia mysteriously injured her hand. Crying, she apologized to Dalton, looking so pitiful.

The elite school was funded by the Aniston family, and naturally, they attended such significant events.

Dalton's mother wanted him to shine, to showcase their family's talent.

But their performance was ruined.

Dalton asked Lydia how she got hurt. She tearfully glanced at Meryl but said nothing.

After much pressing, she finally accused Meryl of hitting her with a brick.

Meryl, just 18, was slapped by Dalton in front of everyone.

“Dalton, how could you hit Meryl?” Lydia rushed over, shielding Meryl. “She’s my sister. I don’t blame her!”

Thinking back, Meryl couldn’t help but laugh bitterly.

There were too many incidents like this to count.

For years, she numbed herself, convincing herself that Lydia’s meddling was the reason she and Dalton drifted apart.

But she forgot it takes two to tango.

Chapter 16 Nowhere to Go

Three years ago, when she was sent to prison, it wasn’t just Lydia’s scheming and her parents’ silent approval. Dalton’s indulgence of Lydia played a crucial role.

He must have had feelings for Lydia.

**3/5**

When he saw Lydia being harassed by thugs, he looked at Meryl with bloodshot eyes and said, “Meryl, for what you did to Lydia, you really should go to hell.”

Just then, a knock on the door interrupted her thoughts.

Meryl instinctively wiped the corners of her eyes.

Walter entered, carrying a breakfast tray. Noticing her red eyes, he chose not to comment.

After setting down the food, he spoke gently, “Ms. Stone, if I may, save your tears for someone who deserves them.”

Meryl was startled, her pale face looking even more fragile. She nodded, “I understand. Thank you.”

“No need to thank me.” Walter hesitated before continuing, “The doctor said you can be discharged tomorrow. Ms. Stone, do you have somewhere to go?”

Meryl bit her lip, focusing on her meal.

She didn’t want to return to the Stone family, and they likely wouldn’t welcome her anyway.



## Chapter 16 Nowhere to Go

But not going back meant she had nowhere to go.

Seeing her struggle, Walter suggested softly, "If you have nowhere to go, maybe you could consider marrying my boss."

Meryl looked up, surprised. "Your boss?"

Walter nodded.

"He's 29, never had a girlfriend, and he's a man of integrity. Marrying him means you won't have to worry about him straying or finding a place to live. He has plenty of houses."

Seeing her shocked silence, he added, "I'm guessing you just went through a breakup? They say when one door closes, another opens. Starting fresh could free you from old heartaches. Why not give it a try?"

Meryl clenched her fingers, then released them.

She understood the logic, but marrying someone she barely knew felt too rushed.

At that moment, another knock interrupted them.

**4/5**

Both Meryl and Walter turned to see Anne, Meryl's best friend.

Their eyes met, and Anne's eyes immediately filled with tears..

She rushed **over** and hugged Meryl tightly. "You silly! How could you let yourself get hurt like this?"

**5/5**

## Chapter 16 Nowhere to Go

Anne had heard everything about what happened the night before. She had been furious at home, wanting to rush to the hospital but worried about disturbing Meryl's rest.

Looking at Meryl, Anne fumed, "Meryl, after everything that jerk has done to you, you're not seriously thinking about marrying him, are you?"

## Chapter 17 Knowing Her Well

Meryl lowered her eyes and said firmly, "I won't marry him."

1/6

In her most helpless moments, Dalton had once been a beacon of hope, a light that brightened her **life**.

Because of that, she had believed in him all these years.

No matter how many times he hurt her, just recalling the scarf he threw to her outside the bathroom that day would make her forgive him.

She had kept compromising, forgetting that people could **change** and that light could shine on someone else.

Anne sighed with relief. "I'm glad you see it now. You were too fixated on him before."

She gently touched the scar **on** Meryl's ankle, her voice filled with guilt. "I'm sorry, Meryl. I couldn't protect you."

Meryl shook her head.

During that time, the Blanchett family was **in** chaos, and Anne had broken her leg in a performance accident.

She had her own troubles, and Meryl understood.

They got so absorbed in their conversation that Walter quietly

Chapter **17** Knowing Her Well

left the room, closing the door behind him.

**2/6**

He headed to the parking lot where Chandler was sitting in the car, smoking.

Seeing Walter approach, Chandler raised an eyebrow. "How did it go?"

"Ms. Stone was pretty surprised. Doesn't seem like she's up for a quick marriage," Walter said honestly.

Chandler stretched his legs, leaning back in his seat with a slight smile. "I figured as much."

He knew Meryl wouldn't agree to something so sudden without

a strong reason.

This thought deepened his gaze.

He casually draped his arm out of the window, thin wisps of smoke rising from his fingers.

Walter got into the driver's seat, glancing cautiously at Chandler before speaking, "Sir, maybe you should just tell her who you really are..."

Chandler tilted his chin, signaling him to continue.

"Tell her you're Dalton's uncle. If she marries you, she'll have a strong position in Kingdom.

"Dalton would have to respect her, and she'd be safe from

Chapter 17 Knowing Her Well

anyone trying to harm her.

"It's a tempting offer. If I were her, I'd consider it.

**3/6**

Walter grew more excited as he spoke, almost saying too much.

He quickly stopped himself and wiped his lips.

Chandler smiled slightly. "Interesting idea."

Walter smiled, scratching the back of his head.

But Chandler quickly shifted his tone. "But you don't understand her."

Walter blinked, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Meryl had been oppressed by her family for so long that revealing Chandler's identity might scare her off, so he couldn't risk that.

Chandler played with the lighter in his hand, thin smoke wafting up, blurring his expression.

At 8 PM, outside an upscale private club, Dalton and Lydia stepped out of the car.

Lydia was visibly nervous, fidgeting with her hands in front of her.

## Chapter 17 Knowing Her Well

4/6

Despite their relationship being relatively low-profile, the chaos of last night's birthday party had thrust her into the spotlight.

She was anxious, worried that Chandler had asked to see her to break her and Dalton a part.

After all, she was a fake socialite with a murky background, hardly a match for someone from such a prestigious family.

Chandler, with his formidable reputation, was known for his hard-nosed approach.

Having spent a decade in the police force and then taking control of Galaxy Holdings Group, he had become a

major power player, sidelining other family members and consolidating his authority.

Such a person clearly had extraordinary means.

The Aniston family was a large, distinguished clan that couldn't tolerate scandals.

If he decided she was a problem, Dalton might not dare to go against him.

Lydia's anxiety grew with every thought.

She tugged at Dalton's sleeve, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "Dalton, I'm really scared... What if your uncle tries to split us up?"

Dalton gently patted her shoulder, his voice soothing. "Don't

## Chapter 17 Knowing Her Well

worry. I'm not going anywhere."

Her eyes were wide and vulnerable as she looked up at him. "Really?"

5/6

His heart ached at her distress. He took her hand in his and spoke softly, "Whatever my uncle says, just agree with him for now. Once he cools off, **things** should settle down."

The drama from last **night** had blown up bigger than Dalton anticipated.

He figured Chandler had called them over to give them a stern talking-to or at most, lay into them a bit.

Lydia nodded, trying to mask her unease.

Then Dalton suddenly remembered. "Has Meryl shown up yet?"

Back in the day, Meryl would have been at his door within hours, ready to patch things up.

But a whole day had passed, and this time, she seemed uncharacteristically stubborn.

Lydia's face tightened slightly at the mention of Meryl. She wasn't pleased but kept her irritation hidden.

"She hasn't come back yet."

She looked at Dalton, her lips pressed together as she said, "Maybe she's still upset with me. Once this **is** over, **I'll** go and get

Chapter 17 Knowing Her Well

6/6

her."

"You're going to fetch her?"

Dalton scoffed. "Let her stay away if she wants. It's not like she's going to make **any** difference."

Lydia hid a smirk as she leaned into him, her eyes glinting with a touch of satisfaction..

"Meryl's being too stubborn this time. When she comes to you, don't be too harsh on her."

Dalton gave a dismissive grunt. "Let's see how she plays it. She's acting like she's got all the leverage, but she's the one who can't **let** go. Meryl really thinks too highly of herself."

He was sure that by tonight, Meryl would come around, begging for forgiveness.

B

Write your comment

Secret Admirer: Finding True Love After... 1/4

## Chapter 18 Eating Dirt

Outside the club, two burly bodyguards stood by the entrance.

Dalton was about to lead Lydia inside when the guards abruptly blocked their path with their arms.

Dalton's expression turned icy. He shot a cold glare at the guards, his voice sharp. "My uncle asked us here. What's the hold-up?"

The guards, towering and unyielding, spoke with a chill in their voices. "I need to report to his inside first."

Annoyed, Dalton was about to lose his cool when Lydia gently lugged on his sleeve.

Sensing Chandler was likely trying to make things difficult for her, she gave the guards a warm, if slightly strained, smile. "It's alright if I wait here. Can you let Dalton go in?"

The night air had turned sharply cold after the rain, and the draft at the club's entrance made it even worse.

Lydia, wearing a sleek satin dress, was visibly shivering, her nose reddening from the chill.

The guard was unmoved by her plea and responded firmly, "No."

## Chapter 18 Eating Dirt

Dalton's face turned stormy.

**2/4**

Frustrated and without a clear outlet for his anger, he watched the guard disappear into the club, leaving them **out** in the cold.

Finally, after more than ten minutes, the guard reappeared.

"Alright, you can go **in** now."

Dalton strode forward, casting a warning glare at the guard, but the guard remained impassive, staring straight ahead.

As the guard was Chandler's man, Dalton decided to let it go.

Inside the private room, Chandler was deep into a card game with Dante and a few others. He didn't even glance up when Dalton and Lydia walked in.

"Uncle Chandler." Dalton greeted, trying to keep his tone steady. "I've brought Lydia."

Just then, Dante **won** a hand and erupted in celebration, his loud cheer drowning **out** Dalton's voice.

Dalton's frustration boiled over. His mood, already sour, grew darker.

Lydia clung to his arm, silently urging him to stay composed.

Another round of cards had just ended, and it had been twenty minutes since they'd arrived.

Chapter 18 Eating Dirt

**3/4**

Dalton decided it was time to speak up. "Uncle Chandler, if you have any issues, take them up with me. Don't make things difficult for Lydia."

Before Chandler could reply, Dante's voice rang out with a mocking edge. "Oh, look at you, playing the knight in shining armor. You two must have quite the thing going on!"

Lydia's face flushed, but she knew better than to provoke Dante.

The Paltrow family was not someone she could afford to cross, even without the added complication of their connection to Chandler.

Chandler lounged casually on the couch, and Dante quickly caught the cue. Tossing aside his cards, he wrapped an arm around Dalton's shoulders.

"Dalton, I heard you've got some great wine stashed here. Let's go check it out."

It was clear that Dante was trying to sideline Dalton.

Dalton hesitated, not wanting to leave Lydia alone with the potential trouble.

He said, "Mr. Paltrow, how about this? I'll have the wine brought here so we can enjoy it in the room. Is that alright?"

Dante glanced over at Chandler. "Alright, that works."

Dante plopped back onto the couch and pointed at Lydia. "Then

## Chapter 18 Eating Dirt

let your lover pour the drinks.”

Dalton’s face hardened. “Please watch your tongue!”

4/4

The other guests in the room looked on with growing interest, clearly enjoying the unfolding d

Lydia’s fingers were digging into her palms, but she forced at composed smile despite t he uncomfortable situation.

She knew she had to endure.

As the tension in the room escalated, Chandler’s cold voice sliced through the air. “If yo u want to drink, do it over there. She stays.”

Lydia’s eyes widened in surprise, and she turned to Dalton with a look of helplessness.

With Chandler’s order given, Dalton knew better than to argue, though he felt a pang of guilt seeing Lydia’s eyes well up.

“Uncle Chandler, what do you need to discuss? Would you mind I stay here too?”

Chandler finally lifted his gaze, his eyes narrowed. “We’re discussing Celestial Ventures Group’s project. Since when do you get a say in the family business?”

B

## Chapter 19 A Deal

Dalton’s face was grim, but he knew better than to let his temper flare up.

“Lydia, don’t worry. I’ll just stay here and drink. Once you’re done, come find me.”

Lydia nodded, relieved to have some time to handle the situation.

The project had been stalled with Chandler for over two weeks, and she was desperate for his signature.

Since he brought it up, she didn’t want to miss this chance.



Fresh out of college, Lydia was placed into the company by Malcolm as a project manager.

Despite his backing, she struggled to earn respect among the older employees.

To make her mark, she had to prove herself with results.

Lydia took a step closer to Chandler, trying to figure out how to broach the subject. "Chandler, about the project..."

Chandler's eyebrow arched coldly. "What did you call me?"

Lydia hesitated, realizing her mistake. "I mean, Mr. Aniston."

Chapter 19 A Deal

**2/6**

"The project can go to Celestial Ventures Group," Chandler said, tapping a cigarette from his **pack**.

"But there's a condition. You have to leave Dalton."

Lydia's face went pale.

If she gave up Dalton for the project, he would surely hate her.

But if she lost the project, explaining **it** to her company and her father would be just as hard.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Lydia was at a loss for words.

Chandler's smirk grew as he observed her struggle.

"You can't have it all. You need to choose."

Lydia lowered her head, feeling the weight of the decision.

The seconds ticked by, and Chandler's patience was wearing thin.

When he uncrossed his legs and stood up, Lydia panicked. "Mr. Aniston, is there really no other option?"

Chandler's gaze was cold and unyielding.

"Do you really think you can negotiate with me?"

## Chapter 19 A Deal

**3/6**

Lydia's voice wavered. "Mr. Aniston, but I truly love Dalton! I can't leave him!"

Chandler's lip curled in a sneer. "Fine, then the project will go to someone else."

Lydia's fingers turned white from gripping tightly. It was clear she had accepted his terms.

No matter what, she was choosing Dalton over the project.

She wasn't as naive as Meryl.

There would be other chances for the project, but Dalton was someone she couldn't let go.

Chandler's eyes swept over her with a mix of amusement and coldness.

"Even though you've chosen Dalton, you two still can't be together."

Lydia froze, feeling as though he were setting a trap for her.

She stared at him, bewildered. "You didn't say that before."

"What did I say?" Chandler's eyes narrowed slightly. "I never promised that giving up the project would mean I'd overlook your relationship."

Lydia felt her heart drop.

## Chapter 19 A Deal

**4/6**

Chandler continued, "You heard about last night, right? The fuss was quite a spectacle. As the head of the Aniston family, it's my responsibility to handle this properly, or it'll reflect badly on

us."

Lydia's jaw tightened as she bit her lip. "But I truly love Dalton. Please, don't tear us apart."

Chandler settled back on the sofa with a nonchalant air. "Tear you apart? If you want to be with Dalton so badly, why don't you just marry him? That way, it'll be one less problem for me."

Lydia's eyes widened in disbelief.

This was exactly what she wanted.

But the Aniston family was a top family, obsessed with bloodlines.

Despite Lydia's upbringing in the Stone family and being pampered, to the high society, she was just an outsider.

Dalton's mother had never considered her worthy.

So, even though Meryl was less capable, the engagement had to be with her, not with Lydia.

Lydia quickly realized that Chandler was trying to force her to back down.

"You're making this difficult. Mr. Aniston, you know Dalton's mother would never approve of our marriage. How could I

Chapter 19 A Deal

possibly marry him?"

5/6

Chandler leaned back with a smirk, his legs crossed. "If you're so set on this, shouldn't you be the one to find a solution?"

Lydia was taken aback. "What solution?"

"You're asking me?"

Chandler's eyes gleamed with cold amusement. "Figure it out yourself. I'm giving you three days to make Dalton marry you. If you can't manage that, then you're out of luck."

Lydia's heart sank.

This was going to be a lot harder than she thought.

If she had a way to make it work, she wouldn't have been secretly dating Dalton for three years without any progress.

Just then, Dante strolled over, holding a glass of wine.

He pointed at Dalton, who was slumped over the table, completely wasted. “Chandler, your nephew can’t handle his liquor. How did he get so drunk so quickly?”

Dante then turned to Lydia.

“You’re not exactly built for this. Should I call someone to help?”

Without a word, Lydia moved to support Dalton, letting him lean on her shoulder.

## Chapter 19 A Deal

6/6

He was out cold, completely unresponsive to everything around him.

Lydia’s mind was in turmoil, consumed by Chandler’s harsh ultimatum.

Amid her frustration, a risky idea flickered in her mind.

Maybe it wasn’t entirely impossible to solve this if she was willing to take a bold step...

When faced with fine liquor, people often lose their restraint.

Not long after Lydia and Dalton left, Chandler found himself thoroughly inebriated.

Walter was preparing to help the drunk Chandler into the car when he got a call from Meryl.

On the other end, Meryl asked cautiously, “Walter, is your boss there?”

Walter was momentarily caught off guard.

“Ms. Stone, have you made your decision?!”

## Chapter 20 Explosive News

Meryl clutched her phone tightly. “Can you pass the phone to him?”

Walter’s voice was hesitant. “Ms. Stone, Mr. Aniston has had quite a bit to drink tonight. It might not be convenient...”

1/5

Before he could finish, Chandler, who was supposed to be asleep. in the back seat, suddenly opened his eyes.

He grabbed the phone from Walter with a decisive motion. "You're looking for me?"

Walter was taken aback, scratching his head.

Just moments ago, he had to support Chandler in walking, and now, he was suddenly alert.

It was almost magical!

Chandler, now visibly drunk, spoke in a deep, husky voice with a slight slur.

Meryl was momentarily stunned. The moment she heard his lazy, alluring voice, a shiver ran down her spine, and goosebumps sprang up all over her body.

His voice was incredibly captivating.

Chapter **20** Explosive News "Meryl?"

Only when Chandler enunciated her name slowly did Meryl snap back to reality.

She gave herself a quick pat on the cheek. "Can I meet with you?"

2/5

"Sure," Chandler replied readily, his speech a bit sluggish and scattered, likely due to the alcohol.

"I'll come to the hospital to see you."

"There's no rush," Meryl said, pressing her lips together.

She could tell he was drunk, and it was better to discuss things when he was sober.

Still, she was curious about the company he ran.

In tough business times, even as a boss, he had to personally handle clients.

Meryl guessed he might be a struggling boss, forced to humble himself for his company.

She adjusted her grip on the phone, then relaxed. "How about tomorrow? You choose the place."

After a brief pause, she suggested, "How about eleven in **the** morning?"

## Chapter 20 Explosive News

3/5

She figured that since Chandler was drunk, he would likely sleep in, so eleven o'clock shouldn't disturb him.

"Eight o'clock," Chandler said, rubbing his forehead to relieve the throbbing pain.

Meryl was surprised. "Eight o'clock?"

"Yes, eight o'clock. I'll pick you up from the hospital."

He even knew she was being discharged tomorrow morning.

Meryl was about to say it wasn't necessary for him to go through the trouble but then realized they had to meet anyway. So, she accepted the arrangement.

After hanging up, Meryl lay in her bed, alone.

Originally, Anne had planned to stay with her, but she had a work trip and had to leave for the airport in the middle of **the** night.

Three years ago, Anne had transitioned from being a dancer to becoming a model due to a leg injury.

The modeling industry was tough, and she was often busy.

To avoid disturbing Meryl's rest, she had left as soon as night fell.

This night, Meryl barely slept with something in mind.

## Chapter 20 Explosive News

The next morning, she woke up at 7:30.

Instinctively, she reached for her phone and **saw** a news alert with an eye-catching headline.

4/5

"A member of the Aniston family was seen spending the night with a woman, suspected of having an affair!"

"An Aniston? That's got to be about Dalton," Meryl thought to herself.

She tapped the notification, and sure enough, Dalton's photo filled her screen.

He was cozied up against Lydia, the two of them tangled together and emerging from what looked like a hotel in the middle of the night.

As she scrolled, the story unfolded in painful detail.

This morning, Dalton and Lydia had been photographed leaving the hotel, surrounded by reporters.

They had checked into the hotel late last night and stayed in the same room all night, only coming out at 7 a.m.

The implication was all too clear.

Even though Meryl knew about their ambiguous relationship, seeing it all laid out in the news hit her like a punch.

Her thoughts were a whirlwind of confusion and hurt.

## Chapter 20 Explosive News

**In** one of the photos, Dalton was trying to shield Lydia's face from the cameras.

5/5

A bitter smile touched Meryl's lips. It was now undeniable that Lydia had snatched her fiancé.

Meryl found herself wondering what her parents would think if they saw this.

Would they regret having taken Lydia's side so fervently?

The thought of her parents' favoritism left her feeling suffocated and deeply hurt, almost unable to breathe.

Just then, the door to her room swung open, and a sharply dressed man stepped in.

B