

## **Ex Convict 1**

### Chapter 1

#### Prologue

The day Grace was released from prison, two men were waiting for her.

One of them sent her to prison, and the other one convicted her.

The snow was very heavy that day. They looked like two snowmen waiting outside the prison.

Grace vowed in her heart, she'd make everyone pay their price.

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"Grace, get yourself a job and be a good person out there."

The prison guard opened the gate and told her so.

Grace nodded. Through the iron bar on the prison window, she saw two black cars parked out of the gate. Waiting for her.

They were Jacob's Benz G-Wagon and Sean's Porsche Panamera.

Heavy snow has caused total chaos on the roads. Jacob and Sean were standing quietly in front of their cars.

Sean held a black umbrella and stared at the gate. Jacob kept looking at his watch.

One of them was Grace's ex-boyfriend, and the other one was her childhood best friend.

How affectionate and caring they looked! If they hadn't sent Grace to prison and told the other inmates to "take good care" of her, maybe she would be moved to tears.

Five years ago, Grace went to confront Lily Atkinson, and her sister Jennifer Atkinson was also there. In an unfortunate turn of events, Jennifer Atkinson died. Although it was a terrible accident, the court still decided to sentence Grace to three years in prison.

Lily dragged her sister's lifeless body out of the car and called the police. Sean arrived soon after.

"Sean, your girlfriend killed my sister!" Lily sat on the ground and cried out.

Sean's first reaction was to push Grace down onto the ground in case she ran away.

But Grace was already too weak to resist because she'd also been hurt. What's more... she was pregnant with Sean's baby.

"How could you be so evil?!" When Jacob rushed over, his eyes were blood shot as he questioned Grace.

Before Grace could explain to the two most important men in her life, she was handcuffed by the police.

In court, Lily's lawyer was Jacob, Grace's childhood best friend, another blow to her heart.

Jacob blamed everything on Grace. She was convicted of reckless driving and involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced to three years of imprisonment.

"Grace, you deserve this. People have to pay for their mistakes," he said.

When Grace first got into prison, she was beaten constantly. She was beaten in places without security cameras and had her nails pulled out. She was yanked by the hair and pressed into toilets. Her back was always being kicked, and it was bruised all the time.

They even broke the bones in her finger, one by one.

At first, Grace didn't know why. She was always stubborn and didn't cry when they hit her.

But after a while, Grace found out why they picked on her exclusively. Grace sucked up to one of the female bosses in prison. She would wash her feet, give her massages, and even do her laundry. Finally, she gained the trust of the female boss, and she told Grace why.

"Girl, you poor little thing. Someone paid us to beat you."

Grace knew who it was then in that instant. Sean.

This was the man who ordered two hundred drones to spell out "I LOVE YOU" in the night sky when he was pursuing her.

He said, "Grace, I will protect you from now on."

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Upon seeing their cars outside the prison gates, Grace begged the prison guard to let her leave from

the back door, to avoid seeing either of their faces.

Besides, what if they were still angry with her and wanted to take their revenge?

I am nothing compared to them. I can't afford to provoke them, but at least I can hide. Grace thought to herself.

In a trance, Grace remembered her confrontation with Lily. Lily stood in front of Grace while holding her dog and shouted, "My dog is worth 70,000 dollars. How much is your grandfather's life worth?"

When Grace was three, her mother died and her father remarried. He abandoned her so her grandfather raised her all by himself.

Her grandfather worked night and day collecting junk and empty bottles for recycling.

When Grace was in junior high, she moved to the city from the countryside and lived in a small rental apartment. Her grandfather told her that they could make more money in the city because there was more junk to collect.

But Grace knew the true reason why her grandfather wanted her to go to school in the city.

The children in the city had shiny hairpins, and Grace wanted them too.

Grace's grandfather once stood outside a small accessories store for hours, then he finally went inside to buy the expensive shiny hairpin for Grace.

When the school offered financial aid to students from poverty-stricken families, Grace's teacher Mrs. Green helped her apply for it. That's when Grace met Jacob, Mrs. Green's son, whom she asked to make friends with Grace.

Jacob had the best scores at school. He occasionally helped Grace with her studies. She was clever and studious, so her grades improved very fast.

Grace's grandfather was very grateful to Mrs. Green, but he didn't have any money, so he offered to help tend her garden.

Mrs. Green lived in a small cottage. Her grandfather swept the garden while Jacob and Grace did their homework and played in the yard.

Mrs. Green joked to Grace's grandfather, "Your little granddaughter is so beautiful and adorable. How about she and Jacob make a cute couple?"

“No, no, Jacob is too good. We don’t deserve him,” he rubbed his hands nervously and said.

Jacob blushed so much that he didn’t even dare to raise his head.

When Grace was accepted by a top university, her grandfather went back to the countryside. He didn’t let Grace go back with him, but she followed him back secretly anyways.

That’s when Grace saw him begging friends for money to cover her college tuition.

Grace’s grandfather did his best to give her everything. Grace vowed in her heart that she would grow up to be a top lawyer so that her grandfather would never have to work again.

He was the best grandfather that anyone could have asked for, but then... he died.

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The year after law school, Grace started dating Sean of the rich and powerful Stevens family. Suddenly, her father wanted to be in her life again, all because of who she was dating.

“What a nice young man. Bless you two.”

This was what her grandfather said the day she took Sean to meet him.

“You are a big girl now. A big girl should have beautiful dresses. My pretty Grace should not wear shabby clothes,” her grandpa added.

So he continued to collect junk to make money behind her back.

Grace told him not to, many times. He was getting too old, and Grace was worried about his health.

It was a winter three years ago.

He was tackled by an unleashed dog in the park when he was collecting junk.

He fell unconscious on the spot and was rushed to the hospital.

It was Lily’s dog. She said it was worth 70,000 dollars.

That day, Grace’s grandpa was sent to the ICU. Due to a fracture of the cervical spine and spinal damage, he became paralyzed.

Grace needed to pay a lot of money to the hospital, so she went to Lily for compensation. It was her dog after all.

Lily stood in front of Grace and said arrogantly, "You are Sean's girlfriend? You didn't get money from him, so you came to me?" Lily had always liked Sean, but he was dating Grace at the time.

"My dog's leg is broken because of your idiot grandfather, I should be the one asking you for money!"

"You and your grandpa are just a bunch of country bumpkin. You both deserve to die."

Grace didn't hold back. She really couldn't. So, she slapped Lily across the face.

Lily and Grace started to fight. Jennifer, who was Lily's sister, saw this and came to help.

Grace couldn't fight two girls as she was pregnant and weak, so she got into her car and wanted to drive away, but Jennifer chased after her in her fancy convertible. That's when the accident happened.

Grace was arrested by the police. She didn't even try to escape. Her grandfather was in the hospital, but no one would listen to a "murderer".

Grace kept shouting Sean's and Jacob's names. Grace hoped that at least one of them could save her grandfather's life.

But they were on the side of Jennifer and Lily.

When Grace was detained, she heard that her grandfather had been in the ICU for 15 days and was discharged.

But he became paralyzed for life, and he didn't want to be a burden to Grace so he committed suicide.

That day, Grace was lying on the ice-cold ground and had a miscarriage.

She couldn't save either her grandfather... or her baby.

When Grace was locked up in prison, Lily went to see her.

Lily whispered to Grace, "My dog has always been obedient. Guess why my dog tackled your grandfather?"

The dog didn't know anything, he only followed his owner's orders, and his owner's heart... was vicious.

Lily hated Grace because she was dating Sean.

Grace had a lot of time to think while she was in prison. She blamed herself for the death of her grandfather. Lily would've never harmed her grandfather if she didn't date Sean.

Grace had a dream that her grandfather came back to life, and he told her how she was a good girl. Grace knew then it was just a dream because she was not a good girl like her grandfather said, she was a piece of garbage.

If she could turn back time, she wouldn't want any shiny hairpins or any nice dresses, and she most certainly wouldn't want Sean.

The only thing she wants is just to have her grandfather back.

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"Aah!" Grace opened her eyes suddenly. Only then did she realize that she had been dreaming of what had happened all those years ago.

She looked down at her calloused hands.

After three years of imprisonment, and multiple fractures and broken bones, her hands would never look or feel the same way again.

Her fingernails had grown back, but the prison doctors hadn't gone out of their way to reset her bones.

Her joints looked distorted, and she had residual pain. I was nerve damage.

There were many fine movements that she couldn't perform very well.

Her fingers hurt more especially when it was cold or humid outside.

Grace flexed her hands and breathed deeply.

It's okay. You're okay.

Today is a new day.

She repeated the mantra as she stood up and resumed working.

Sometimes, the memories threatened to consume her.

She'd lost more than just her freedom in that accident.

Her future. Her boyfriend. Her grandpa.

Everyone and everything she'd cared about was gone in an instant.

Jennifer Atkinson whom she'd accidentally killed was the daughter of one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the country. What's more, she was the fiancée of Jason Reed—the most powerful man in the city.

It's okay. You're okay.

Today is a new day.

You don't need anybody.

Grace finished mopping the room.

She was wearing the bright-colored work suit of a sanitation worker with her long hair tied into a simple ponytail.

She caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror on the wall. Her delicate face was slightly reddish due to the cold weather, and her mouth was pressed into a thin line.

If you were to only look at her face, you would think she was a student who had just graduated from college. But gone was that youthful ignorance.

She'd seen how cruel the world could be.

The eyes that stared back at her were old, far older, and duller than they should be.

She sighed and rolled the cleaning supplies toward the door.

Sitting down for a few minutes had been foolish.

She hadn't meant to drift off to sleep.

With an eye on the time, she moved quickly and efficiently to clean the rest of the building.

The life of a sanitation worker wasn't glamorous, but after she left prison, this was the only job she could find.

When she was about to leave, she heard a colleague watching the news on her mobile phone.

“Whoa! Lily is engaged to Sean Stevens! What a lucky girl Lily is! As a superstar and a daughter of a rich and powerful family, now she is going to marry into the wealthy Stevens family too.”

Grace shuddered, and then she hurried out of the Sanitation Service Center.

She took a deep breath. Then another.

She repeated her mantra and pushed the thoughts of her ex-boyfriend and his new fiancée far from her mind.

She swept the walkway as this was her routine.

This time of year, the cold winter wind blew and it pained her hands terribly.

She should've stopped to grab her coat, but she'd been too fixated on escaping her co-worker and any more 'good news' about the happy couple.

A couple that had stood by and watched as she was savagely beaten.

Suddenly, a Ferrari stopped in front of her.

Three men and a woman got out of the car; they were obviously drunk.

One of the men looked at Grace with a tipsy expression. He laughed cruelly. “I know you. What are the odds of finding Sean's ex-girlfriend?”

Grace paled. She wasn't expecting to encounter anyone tonight, let alone someone she recognized.

The man in front of her was a trust fund baby that she had once cussed out when he'd made a pass at her back when she was dating Sean.

In hindsight, many of Sean's friends were elitist creeps. She should've paid more attention to that, after all, birds of a feather flock together.

“Aren't you a great lawyer? Why are you sweeping the road here?” Christopher Peterson asked knowingly.



Another man stepped forward after Christopher. Grace didn't recognize him. "Can a woman who has been in prison be a lawyer again?" he questioned.

The woman laughed. "Bah, a lawyer? Just a janitor now!"

Christopher stepped closer. "Surely there are better ways for you to make money. Come with me," he said. "I'll pay you for a night, beats sweeping the streets."

He held out his big, fat hand and the other three burst into laughter.

But Christopher wasn't asking, he was already moving in on Grace.

Grace dodged, but the building was right behind her and there was nowhere to run. He grabbed her arms and pressed her against the wall at the side of the road.

It was late at night, and no one passed by this area.

She screamed but she knew her coworkers inside the building wouldn't hear.

Christopher's friends got back into the car. They didn't care what Christopher did to her.

He knocked her head back against the wall, and her vision dimmed.

The hand around her throat tightened and she clawed at it. "L-let me go..."

He used his free hand to pull at his belt, and Grace kicked out hard, kneeing him in the groin.

"You bitch!"

He backhanded her so hard that her ears started to ring.

When she kicked again, he jumped backward, and it was just the chance she needed. Grace took off running.

Christopher blocked the way to her building, so she had no choice but to run down the street.

Construction on the road limited the traffic and the late hour ensured there was no one to help her—or to hear her scream.

When the car roared to life and tires screeched, she knew he hadn't abandoned the chase. She stuck to the sidewalk thinking she could evade them, but when she turned down a side street, the car jumped the curb and followed.

When she came out the other side and circled back down the next street, thinking she could run back to the Sanitation Center for safety, the car cut around her and clipped her.

She collapsed to the ground and struggled to get up.

Christopher leaped out of the car and left it running. His two friends fanned out on either side. The headlights all but blinded her.

She scrambled to stand as Christopher pulled off his belt. He shook his head at Grace. "You didn't think I forgot the way you insulted me, did you, bitch? You told Sean to stop working with me, it cost my family millions!"

He advanced on her like a predator.

"Sean isn't here to protect you now." He coiled his belt around his hand like he meant to strike her with it.

"Fight all you like, but I'm going to fuck you like the bitch you are, right here on the street."

Grace struggled to get up, she didn't think anything was broken, but she was still slow and disoriented.

When Christopher lunged, she tried to move, but his heavy body pinned her to the concrete. He fumbled at her clothes and she fought.

"Stop! Get off me!"

She thrashed even as he brought his hand down with the belt. It burned the skin along her arm and the buckle cut through her clothes and skin.

"Stop it! Stop!!!" Grace cried at the top of her lungs.

"I think you should listen to the lady." A cold voice sounded behind her.

Christopher froze.

Grace turned her head to the man standing beside them. She didn't know where he came from.

"Fuck off!" Christopher told him.

Christopher didn't feel scared of the man, it was three against one.

Grace whimpered. She had no reason to think this newcomer would risk himself for some stranger on the street.