

## Ex Convict 38

### Chapter 38

What kind of suffering did she endure to be so dismissive when recounting these experiences?

“In the future, if anyone hurts you, I won’t let them get away,” he said as if he was making an oath.

She rubbed his head of black hair. Treating him very much like the younger brother she professed him to be.

But he knew better. He’d gotten close to her and saw how she responded to him.

She might try to keep him at arm’s length, but they were far past that.

“Jay, I’m a big girl, and I can take care of myself. Don’t keep saying stuff like that.” She smothered a yawn. “Hurry up and eat.” As she spoke, she lowered her head and continued eating. the food before her.

A spark flashed through his eyes as if he was thinking of something.

The incident had indeed been blown out of proportion and yet it did not occur to Lily that her company would be unable to suppress this top search.

There were simply too many sites and too many people talking about the event.

And while her people could bribe some news outlets, there were simply too many and the scene of her standing at the roadway while an entire dumpster of garbage was opened and sorted... that was sweeping the world and trending.

Damn it!

Between the missing ring and speculation of what it cost and looked like, and the sanitation workers going through the trash looking for it, there was more than enough fodder to keep people talking.

The corresponding images were especially publicized. In it, she was dressed flashily as she stood beside the rubbish piles, and next to her were several sanitation workers bent over the trash looking for the ring.

Such a contrast immediately generated the ire of many. They all accused her of being morally flawed and putting on airs.

The ‘rich bitch’ who watched while others labored.

There were even some online who stated, “She lost her own ring and still wanted the sanitation workers to find it. They have already been working hard sweeping the roads for the entire day. Why didn’t she look through the rubbish herself?”

“So she’s better than everyone just because she’s a celebrity?”

“Who is she to hog the city’s resources? She doesn’t pay the sanitation workers’ salaries. Why does she need so many people to help her look for a ring?”

Even if Lily’s fans worked hard to clear their idol’s name, they were unable to curb those negative comments. There had been plenty of people at the scene and many of them had recorded videos of the incident and uploaded them online.

It was a PR nightmare!

“Why can’t the top search be taken down?” Lily saw that the negative comments online had increased and she was no longer able to sit still.

“There’s nothing we can do. I don’t know what’s wrong with these key influencers. We’re reaching out and asking them to stop posting. We’re offering to compensate them. But they just aren’t willing to take down all of the related content.”

“This is absurd!” Lily shouted. “Offer them more money!”

“We have,” her manager said. “And we have to be careful not to push too hard because that could blow up in our faces. We don’t want them to start saying that we’re trying to buy them. or silence them. Free speech and all that.” There was some rustling on the other end of the phone as if he was covering the mouthpiece. “Not for nothing, but if you’d called me immediately, instead of just your agent and publicist, I would’ve told you to keep your money and to lavish it on the workers. Or to forget about the ring and go buy a new one-it would’ve cost a

fraction of what we’re spending now on damage control. Damn it, Lily, you could’ve spun this way better, if you’d rewarded those poor people or if you’d actually gotten your hands dirty yourself.”

Lily sucked in a breath. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t just run your mouth at me,” she said icily.

But his words struck a chord with her.

She could’ve handled this better.

Better if she hadn’t started this farce in the first place.

The manager relented. “Sure. Fine. Hopefully, we won’t run into a situation like this again.” He was quiet for a moment. Then: “Lily, did you offend someone, I mean not the public or those workers today? I mean someone big...”

“Why do

you ask?”

“Because money cures most everything, and this situation...we aren’t able to pay to sweep it away. So I’ll ask again, who did d you piss off?”

“Who could I have offended?” She pondered over it. “I’m an Atkinson, and I’m engaged to Sean. Everybody else should be afraid of offending me, unless...”

Lily froze. Could it be Jason Reed?

There were very few people more powerful than her family or the Stevens-family. And it would take a lot of power and money for her to be refused. The ones who were capable of hiding the truth from the masses and who would be able to influence those key opinion leaders and the media...were few, and Jason was one of them.

“Could it really be that because of Jennifer’s death, he was taking out his anger on her and Sean?”

There had been no change, and their businesses had continued as usual with Reed Group. Jason had accepted their wedding

invitation.

And yet, as Lily thought of the previously taken-down projection ads, she was suddenly not so sure.

“Oh no,” her manager whispered.

“What!? What is it?”

“Turn on your television.”

Lily flipped on the tv. It showed aerial footage of the Sanitation Center and people sweeping the street and spraying it down where they’d emptied the dumpster to sort through the garbage.

Then the scene cut to security footage photos of her, with closeups of her hand.

“Police in the city launched this investigation in a matter of hours. And they made a shocking discovery...’ the reporter said.

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‘A composite of a series of security camera footage to prove that Lily had not lost a ring.’ The reporter shook her head at the camera. ‘It’s clear from the photos that she wasn’t wearing it. The cameras show that she had only been wearing a pinkie ring. Other than that, there had been no other ring.’ The reporter shrugged. “The ring in question was purported to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. She frowned. ‘Perhaps Miss Atkinson just misplaced it.’

At that line, the co-anchor arched a brow. “Oh, yes, Joann. I can see how hard it must be to keep track of millions of dollars of jewelry.”

The sarcasm was brutally effective.

In the blink of an eye, Lily was utterly hated on the internet. The fans who had originally defended her were powerless against such circumstances.

What else could they say? The police had already issued a detailed investigation report.