

## Kissed AOM 1941

### Chapter 1941

"I'm familiar with these parts. Let me know who you're looking for and I might just happen to know them!" The man promptly extended his hand to block Melody's path when he saw her attempt to walk around him. "Don't be in such a hurry to leave. That's just plain rude. I'm just helping you out of the kindness of my heart. Don't just ignore me like that."

Having nowhere to go after being blocked, Melody dealt patiently with him and said, "I came with a male companion, and I'd like to go meet him now. Could you please let me through?"

She believed that she had spoken in as polite a manner as possible, but the man seemed to misunderstand her and grow angry. "Who is he? Tell me!"

"I'm under no obligation to tell you that." Melody tried to avoid engaging in a conversation with that man, but he continued to block her way. Melody's expression soured and she asked with a sigh, "What do you want from me?"

"Well, I want you to have a drink with me! I can let you leave," the man said as he casually took a glass of wine from the table and handed it to Melody. "But you must raise me a toast before you go!" Melody looked at the wine glass in front of her but hesitated to take it. Her alcohol tolerance was not too bad, and a glass of wine was just fine. However, drinking alcohol had landed her in danger twice, and she could not tell if the wine was spiked. She was not that naive to think that she could be allowed to leave just by drinking that glass of wine. Once she started drinking, he would probably push her to drink a second, then a third, up until she got drunk!

"I'm sorry, but I don't drink," Melody walked to the side to try and avoid him.

The man stretched out his hand and pulled her back. "I won't allow a rude woman to leave that easy."

"Ah!" Melody was not accustomed to wearing high heels, and she lost her balance when he grasped her.

Just when she thought she was going to make a fool of herself in front of all those people, a man appeared behind her and supported her by placing his arm around her waist. He helped her stand steadily and said, "Are you alright?"

Melody came back to her senses and was stunned to see a familiar figure.

The man who helped Melody up raised his eyes and said coldly, "I'm her friend. Do you need something from her?"

The man who tried to hit on Melody immediately stopped his overbearing attitude. He shrugged and sheepishly left while holding the glass of wine.

After making the man leave, Melody's savior smiled at her and asked worriedly, "You okay? I hope I didn't scare you."

Melody was overcome with a sense of inferiority when she saw the man's gaze. 'Why is he here?'

The man saw her silence and asked, "Don't you recognize me anymore? It's barely been a couple of years since we last spoke to each other."

"I... I still do," Melody replied awkwardly and realized that she was a little too anxious. She quickly lowered her head and said, "You're Sherman, right? Sherman Parr."

Melody's mind recalled her first day of high school when she stood among the sea of freshmen and looked up at Sherman as he addressed everyone on stage as their representative. From that moment on, Sherman became a guiding light in her life, and Melody would often look up to him. Alas, she never had the courage to reach out to him because she felt inferior.

## Chapter 1942

Sherman and Melody went to different universities after high school and lost contact with each other since then. She did not expect that her unrequited crush would show up in front of her again after all those years.

"We haven't seen each other for pretty long now. I heard you managed to get into a good university. How was your time there? Where are you posted now?" Sherman asked about her achievements. Melody did not even dare to look up at him. It was difficult for

her to tell him that Helen did not allow her to work and instead asked her to stay at home to 'take care of her family'. As a result, Melody never worked a day in her life since she graduated.

"Don't feel pressured to answer that question," Sherman said after sensing her change in mood. "I was unsure if I had the right person when I saw you from a distance earlier. That guy from earlier is a famous playboy in New Capital City. Do you know him?"

Melody breathed a sigh of relief when he changed the subject. "I don't know him, and I have no idea what I did to make him angry. He wouldn't let me leave..."

"Because you're beautiful," Sherman said, chuckling.

Melody raised her head and looked at him in disbelief, wondering if she had heard that compliment right. Melody felt her cheeks gradually getting hot, and she could not hide her smile. "You're too kind, Sherman. Everyone's dressed beautifully here, and I don't stand out as much as they do."

"That's not true. You've always been beautiful, but you tend to lower your head all the time and shy away from letting others get a glimpse of your beauty." Sherman bent down slightly and approached her. "Don't you remember what I told you when we were in high school? You need to be more confident."

Melody looked into his brown eyes and was transported back to her memory of high school.

There was a play that her class had to do for a report, and she was assigned the role of a maid. The role was relatively insignificant and did not require her to say any lines, but it did require her to perform some simple dance moves on stage. Those dance moves were simple enough for Melody to master, but she had never been on stage before and was never allowed any say at home.

Because of that, she lacked self-confidence and found it hard to raise her head before she went onstage.

At that time, Sherman said to her, "You're beautiful, so try to be more confident in yourself."

Melody did not expect that she would see Sherman again after so many years. "Why are you here by the way?" The rich man who accosted her earlier seemed to show much deference to Sherman. That seemed to point to the possibility that Sherman had a strong family background.

"I'm here to attend the birthday banquet. How about you? Do you know the host too?" Sherman asked with a smile.

Melody looked at him and struggled to answer. Telling him that she was accompanying her husband to the banquet did not seem like an ideal thing to do since Lucas was not her real husband.

She was silent like before, so Sherman suggested that they sit on the nearby sofa. "Shall we take our conversation somewhere that's a little quieter?"

Melody seemed receptive to the idea and followed him to sit on the sofa.

"Women should go easy on the alcohol. I'll get you something else to drink." Sherman got back up and walked to fetch a different drink in the distance as soon as he sat down and saw the drinks on the table. Melody felt an inexplicable throbbing in her heart when she looked at Sherman's rear figure. He was still the same person that he always was, and Melody was reminded of an unforgettable moment on that one winter afternoon in her second year of high school.

When gym class was over, she rushed back to the classroom to get some sanitary napkins because she was on her period.

#### Chapter 1943

Unfortunately, Melody was unable to find any sanitary napkins after searching every corner of her school bag. She remembered putting them in though, as she had always been in the habit of packing her bags since a young age. Preparing for the next day was something of a routine for her, so she did not have any doubt in her mind that she had placed the sanitary napkins in her school bag. As a result, it was rather puzzling that they disappeared right after she was done with gym class.

Melody had no choice but to borrow them from her classmates.

"Do any of you have sanitary napkins?"

"Could you lend me a sanitary napkin? I'll bring a new one tomorrow for you."

Alas, all the students answered her with a resounding, "No."

Since no one was able to give her sanitary napkins, she could only sit dejectedly in her seat. All her pocket money was taken away by Wendy, and she could not buy another pack. The money Helen gave her was not much to begin with, and Wendy would always come up with various reasons to demand her pocket money.

Melody ran out of ideas. She was bound to soil her clothes if she did not find a solution soon.

"Are you going to have your period today?" Wendy sat in front of her and looked at her with a mocking expression. "Why are you so careless? Don't you know that you should wear a pad during your period?" Wendy was a year older than Melody, but she was behind a grade because she never did well in her studies. As a result, they ended up in the same class. Wendy was a lively character that contrasted starkly with Melody's tendency to isolate herself in silence. As a result, Wendy was more popular than Melody among their classmates.

Those close to Wendy ostracized Melody, and by extension, it became an unspoken rule among the other classmates. With tears in her eyes, Melody said, "Could you buy a pack of sanitary napkins for me? I

"I'd love to if I could, but I don't have any money!" interrupted Wendy.

Melody answered helplessly, "But... You took away the pocket money that mom gave me yesterday..."

Wendy frowned and said in disgust. "When did I do that? Don't blame me if you weren't careful."

"Yeah, Melody! Don't accuse Wendy without any proof."

"Don't blame other people."

Wendy's high-pitched voice resonated in everyone's eardrums, and the other students pointed at Melody after hearing what they said. The situation seemed to suggest that she had done something wrong. Melody was powerless to explain, so she ran out of the classroom alone and ran off to the playground. She would rather sit on the bleachers and make a fool of herself alone, rather than doing so in front of all her classmates.

Someone then came up to her and said, "Here you go."

"

Melody looked up and saw a boy standing in the sun with a pack of sanitary napkins in his hand. "I know that girls usually tend to prefer a certain type of sanitary napkins, but since I'm not sure which ones you prefer, I just took one at random."

The sheepish Melody stood up slowly and looked at the boy in disbelief.

He smiled and said, "I saw you asking to borrow them earlier, so I got them for you since I was already going to get something from the store anyway."

Melody then reached out and took the pack of sanitary napkins. "Thank you."

Chapter 1944

"You're welcome. It's no biggie," the boy said as he turned around to leave.

Melody then called out to him. "What's your name? I'll pay you back another day."

"I'm Sherman. Don't worry about it. It's not that expensive anyway." Sherman smiled warmly at her and left.

Melody looked at the sanitary napkin in her hand and felt a fuzzy feeling in her heart. As he left, she silently repeated the name to herself, "Sherman." The boy from her memory had grown into a handsome and elegant man. He walked toward Melody with a glass of juice and said, "Here's some juice." The scene was almost a *deja vu* as he placed the drink in front of Melody and said, "I'm not sure which flavor you prefer, so I just took one at random."

"Thank you." Though her response was the same as when she was 18, things seemed to have changed drastically since then. At times, she wondered what things would have been if she was braver. Perhaps her story with Sherman would have a better ending. Unfortunately, it was too late for regrets.

"You haven't told me about your relationship with the host of this banquet." Sherman sat down and asked her again.

Melody snapped back from her reminiscing, but she found it difficult to answer his question. She did not want Sherman to know that she was 'married', and she selfishly wanted him to have a good impression of her.

"You're still as quiet as always." Sherman gently patted her forehead, eliciting a blush from Melody. "You've been like that ever since high school."

Sherman then swirled his drink gracefully before saying, "People were always bullying you, but you kept quiet as if it was none of your business."

At the mention of what happened in high school, Melody smiled helplessly and said, "I wouldn't call myself quiet. I just don't think it's worth the effort when I know it's going to be pointless anyway." "There are times where it'll be better to voice out," Sherman looked at her poignantly.

Melody avoided his gaze and asked, "What have you been up to these past few years, by the way? Are you doing well?"

"I am. I graduated successfully and did another three years of postgrad. I started working in my family company, but my mother's been nagging me to get married and forcing me to go on blind dates all the time," Sherman said helplessly. "I'm sure you're well aware of my mother's temper. That seems to be the only thing she talks about whenever I show up in front of her. She's never going to stop nagging about it until she gets me to do what she wants."

Melody then recalled the one time she saw Sherman's mother from afar. The woman seemed like one of those strong women, and Sherman listened quietly as she lectured him.

That image elicited a wry smile from Melody as she said, "Your mother is urging you for your own good. I'm sure every parent wants their children to get married as soon as possible."

"Yes, I'm aware of that," Sherman sighed and looked deeply into her eyes. The two of them chatted happily away as they reminisced.

Unfortunately, Melody could not get a break. A handsome pair of eyes was eyeing them from afar. Lucas planned to wait for Melody so they could enter together, but he ran into a friend and went upstairs for a chat in the VIP room. By the time he went back downstairs to look for her, he saw her sitting on the sofa with another man, seemingly enjoying her time. Melody's smile made Lucas narrow his eyes; she never smiled like that in front of him.

"Mister Lucas, about that land I just mentioned..." said a middle-aged man next to Lucas. The man handed over a wine glass carefully, fearing that he might misspeak and lose the Rivera Group's cooperation.

#### Chapter 1945

Lucas showed him no courtesy and set the wine glass aside before heading down. "You can discuss work matters with Edmund. He'll hand over your proposal to me," he said without even bothering to look at the man. The middle-aged man could only stare helplessly. He did not dare to ask any more questions or follow Lucas down.

Lucas went downstairs and walked straight toward Melody. He wanted to know what it was that his gorgeous fiancée was talking about so happily with that stranger.

"When did you arrive?" The familiar voice stiffened Melody's smile. She looked in the direction of the voice and saw Lucas's serious expression. She could tell from his reaction that he was in a bad mood, and she associated his reaction with Sherman sitting next to her.

Lucas had warned her before their cooperation that she should be careful in the way she carried herself in public. Seeing her chatting happily with another man in such a setting must have angered him. She sighed before standing up and replying, "I—"

"She just arrived," Sherman said on Melody's behalf before she could finish her words. "I didn't expect you to be here too, cousin."



'Cousin?' Melody was surprised to hear that. She did not expect Sherman to be Lucas' cousin! It was a small world, evidently. All she hoped was that Lucas would stop talking to her at that point. She did not want Sherman to know about the 'marriage' she had with Lucas.

"I just returned home a few days ago, and I've been so busy that I haven't had the time to visit the grandparents. I wonder how they're doing now?" Sherman naturally struck up a conversation with him on family matters.

Lucas's attention seemed focused on Melody, and he merely nodded blankly in response to Sherman's questions.

"What about you? When did you arrive?" Lucas narrowed his eyes and questioned Melody. Her hopes that he would not talk to her had been dashed right that instant.

Sherman was startled by his question and looked at her in confusion. "You're acquainted with my cousin?"

"Yes..." Melody smiled awkwardly.

Lucas was a little unhappy that Melody entertained Sherman instead of looking for her immediately. He was her fiancée, yet he went to another man rather than be with her. "Come here, Melody," Lucas said before Melody could explain anything to Sherman.

She looked at the two men in a dilemma and finally walked helplessly toward Lucas. "Is there anything you need from me?"

"Did you forget why Edmund sent you here?" Lucas had a cold expression.

Melody smiled sheepishly and said, "He told me to look for you..."

"In that case," Lucas said, before pausing briefly and continuing, "why didn't you come to me as soon as you reached the venue?" Melody finally understood why he did not look pleased. As it turned out, he was not pleased that she did not look for him right away.

"I searched everywhere for you," Melody explained anxiously, "but someone tried to pressure me into drinking some wine at the banquet hall. Sherman saved me from him." Lucas's eyes narrowed slightly as his expression sank. "Pressure you? What did he do to you?"

Melody tried to wave off the intensity as she sensed his swelling anger. "No, no, he was just very insistent, that's all. I didn't want to entertain him because I was in such a hurry to look for you."

"I see," Lucas replied curtly and pulled her close. His hand rested possessively on her lower back.

Knowing that Sherman was behind her, Melody reached out and stopped Lucas' arm hesitantly. "Wait, Lucas. I'll have to say goodbye to my senior before we leave."

Lucas stopped and looked at her with a frown. "What are you going to say to him?"

"Just a minute," Melody said as she turned to face Sherman. "I need to go now. It was lovely seeing you again. Let's talk sometime soon."

Sherman stared at them in bewilderment. "Are you that close with my cousin?"

His voice was tinged with surprise. He had assumed they were mere acquaintances who perhaps recognized each other from a previous meeting, but the sight of them holding hands seemed to paint a different picture.

Melody avoided his gaze and was unsure how to explain their relationship. "We're..."

"Are you a friend of his?" Sherman asked.

Before she could answer, Lucas stepped forward and tightened his grip around her shoulder. "We're not friends," he said in a firm voice.

Melody flinched at his touch, and her vision darted inadvertently toward Sherman. She did not want him to know about the messy entanglement she had with Lucas. Lucas, however, seemed intent on revealing the truth.

"And how dare you call her by her name? You should address her as Missus Rivera now," he said, his voice laced with a hint of mockery.

Sherman clenched his jaw. "Missus Rivera? You're married to my cousin?" His disbelief was evident.

Melody's emotions sank. After years of having a crush on him and finally being able to build a connection with him during their chance encounter, Lucas shattered all hope of a future with Sherman in a matter of moments. She had barely just reconnected with Sherman, yet Lucas had already nipped the budding feeling in the bud.

With a heavy heart, she nodded slowly. "Yes... We're married."

A bitter smile formed on Sherman's lips after a brief moment of shock. "So, it seems. As my cousin says, I should call you ma'am from now on."

The distant way in which he addressed her was like daggers stabbing Melody's soul. The man who was once her source of sunshine became a distant figure that would remain forever out of reach. Lucas then whispered sarcastically into Melody's ear, "Are you that close with my cousin? Did you enjoy a nice conversation?"

Sherman sensed the underlying animosity between them, so he chuckled and tried to lighten the mood. "She and I are high school classmates. It's been years since we last saw each other, so we just caught up with each other earlier."

Chapter 1947

"Is that so?" Lucas scoffed, seemingly unconvinced. He pulled Melody into a hug and turned to leave.

Melody could not help but steal a glance back at Sherman as a helpless sigh escaped her lips.

Lucas released her only after he led her to a secluded spot.

Lost in thought, Melody bumped into a pillar and cried out, "Ouch!"

Lucas subconsciously reached out to help, but his expression sank and he stopped himself mid-way when the memory of Melody and Sherman's cheerful conversation appeared in his mind. Melody clutched her head in pain.

"What's the matter?" Lucas sneered. "Did you get distracted by your classmate?"

"You don't have to be so snarky about it. We're just classmates." Melody's unhappiness grew when he made snide comments at her while she was in pain.

Lucas narrowed his eyes. The usually demure Melody shot back at him for Sherman's sake gave him a clearer idea of how deeply Sherman mattered to her. It was all the worse that she had those sorts of ambiguous feelings toward other men when she was already married!

Lucas felt like it was a sign of disrespect.

"You seem to have a knack of charming men wherever you go," he sneered.

"It was just a harmless conversation over our time at high school!" Melody countered exasperatedly.

Lucas snorted. "Know your place, Melody. Your actions reflect not only on yourself but on the Riveras too."

His reminder brought Melody back to her senses, and she realized that she had overstepped her line. "I'm sorry. I was too careless. I'll be more attentive to how I carry myself in the future."

He took a step closer as his imposing presence pressed down on her. "Mind your attitude, too. Remember, I just loaned you three million. Shouldn't you prioritize me over that senior of yours?"

Melody looked up at him. His condescending gaze highlighted the power imbalance between them.

"Like you said, it's a loan. I'm going to pay it back to you with interest anyway," she said defiantly.

"Oh?" He reached out, placed his hand on her waist, and pulled her closer to him. "What sort of interest are we talking about?" He ignored her struggling and looked at her from head to toe. "What are you worth? Is it your body?"

"Mister Lucas!" Melody felt offended and pushed him away with all her might. "Just because I owe you money doesn't mean I've sold my dignity to you. I'll find a legitimate way to pay you back, no matter what it takes!"

Her uncharacteristic outburst only infuriated Lucas, who scoffed. "I'm just stating a fact. What else can you offer that's worth all that money?"

"Lucas!" Melody's anger boiled over.

He pulled her back into his arms and asked, "Why are you so reluctant to offer your body up as a means of paying me back?"

Melody glared at him and felt the urge to stop his uncouth remarks with a slap.

"Need me to repeat the question?" he mocked as he leaned in closer. His face was inches away from kissing hers.

He paused for a moment and so was mesmerized by her inviting lips that he was lost in a daze for a moment.

"Lucas." A gentle voice broke Lucas' trance and snapped him back to reality. He released Melody and then turned to face the source of the voice.

Chapter 1948

A woman in a light purple dress stood behind them with a confused expression. "What brings you here, Lucas?"

"Nothing in particular," Lucas replied curtly, releasing Melody.

The woman approached Melody and sized up the latter with a smile. "That dress is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. I was told it had been reserved when I tried to order one. Who would've thought that I'd see it or someone here."

Melody knew that Lucas had chosen an expensive dress, but she did not think that it would be that limited. "I'm just borrowing it for the evening," she explained.

The woman smiled faintly. "I see."

Something in the woman's natural-sounding tone seemed to make Melody a little uneasy. There was a subtle hostility that Melody could not quite place her finger on. They had never met before, so that beckoned the question of why the woman was showing such animosity toward her. A sudden thought occurred to her, and she glanced at Lucas with a brewing suspicion that he was the reason.

"Lucas," the woman shifted her attention back to Lucas. "Grey suits complement your best features. Why are you wearing black today?"

The familiarity in how she addressed him hinted that they had known each other for quite some time. Melody observed their unspoken rapport with curiosity as she wondered what history those two had. "Black is more formal," Lucas replied succinctly. It was clear from his tone that he felt differently toward that woman.

As Melody studied the elegantly dressed woman, something in her memory seemed to click. That woman seemed to have been someone whom she had seen on the big screen before. Then, it hit her. "Wait a minute! You're the actress, Stella Lybeck!"

"Yes," Stella confirmed with a more genuine smile. "Today's my birthday celebration, and I'm so glad you could make it."

It turned out that the extravagant event was Stella's birthday party which Lucas had been invited to celebrate.

Melody did not know that was the case and felt a little awkward. After all, she was a guest by association with Lucas.

"You don't seem very familiar. Which family are you from?" Stella was implying that she did not know Melody at all and was curious why a stranger would be at her party.

Her question left Melody feeling increasingly awkward as she turned to Lucas and said, "I... I came with Lucas."

"Oh?" Stella's gaze drifted back to Lucas. "Is she your date?"

Melody recalled Lucas' displeasure when she introduced themselves to Sherman as friends, so she made a point to uphold the facade of his elegant wife and took a step forward to introduce herself. "Miss Stella, we're "

"Friends," Lucas interjected curtly and cut her off before she could elaborate.

Melody was stunned, but she had a rough idea of why he might have acted that way and tactfully kept silent.

Chapter 1949

It seemed that Lucas was not keen on letting Stella know the truth of their relationship.

"Friend? As in, 'girlfriend' or just a normal friend?" Stella teased.

"Just a normal friend," Lucas replied without hesitation.

Melody reacted somewhat awkwardly and pursed her lips. "Yes. Mister Lucas and I are friends-new friends, I might add. I heard about this event and persuaded him to bring me along and experience the sights. I hope you don't misunderstand our relationship."

Since Lucas did not want Stella to know about them, she dutifully played along with him.

Stella did not seem to have any particular reaction toward Melody's remark and reached out to hold Lucas' hand. "A friend of Lucas is a friend of mine. Speaking of which, what was your name again?" "My name's Melody," she answered. Despite playing the role of Lucas' wife for so long, she had never been so intimate with him in public. He was, after all, averse to physical contact with members of the opposite gender, yet he neither flinched nor pulled away when Stella held her. The intimacy between them was so

different from his usual reserved demeanor, and Melody felt indescribably uneasy because of that.

"Nice to meet you, Melody. Since you're Lucas' friend, then please come with me." Stella smiled magnanimously and brought Lucas to the second floor.

Melody answered softly and followed silently from behind. The second floor was a private zone, and Melody pushed open a door as she entered with Lucas. "Where were you, Stella? We've all been waiting to raise a glass to you!" someone called out to Stella as soon as they entered. "Oh, and Lucas is here too!"

Melody just tagged along like an invisible, inconspicuous person. The room was filled with well-dressed young men and women. They were all laughing and conversing like old friends. Melody recognized none of them, nor could she understand what they were talking about. She did not feel like she belonged there, and she had no intention of forcing herself to mingle with them.

She found a quiet corner and sat down with a glass of juice. From time to time, she stole glances at Lucas from across the room, noticing that he had such a soft expression when speaking to Stella that it was almost as if he was a different person from his usual self. For some reason, Melody felt a little sad when she saw Lucas sitting there with Stella. She was his wife-granted, in name only-yet he treated her like a stranger while reserving his warmth for another.

A sigh escaped her lips and she drank the juice in one gulp. She comforted herself by reiterating that it was just a job. Just because her 'employer' ignored her did not mean she could slack on the 'job'. Then, Stella appeared beside her and extended a glass of red wine. "Why are you drinking juice when there's wine to be shared?"

Melody took the glass with a grateful smile. "Thanks, but I'm not much of a drinker."

"Loosen up, Melody," Stella insisted and clinked her glass against Melody's. "These people here are friends of myself and Lucas. Just relax and enjoy the night."

Though Melody had already made it clear that she did not drink, she felt that it would be incredibly rude to refuse, especially when Stella had already clinked glasses with her. In the end, she gave in and took a small sip.

Chapter 1950



The wine had a strong alcohol content, and the sharp bite from that one sip burned like fire down Melody's throat. "I don't go to events like these often," she admitted, "so I'm not very used to the atmosphere here. Don't mind me, though. Go and have fun. I'll be fine on my own."

Stella smiled playfully. "That won't do! You're Lucas' friend, and I'm obliged to entertain you. However." She leaned in confidentially. "Lucas isn't exactly a social butterfly, especially when it comes to women. You're the first female friend he's brought to a banquet, so I'm curious to know how you two met each other."

The question was a little tricky. She could not bring herself to tell Stella the truth of their tumultuous first encounter in a hotel bedroom. That would shatter Lucas' carefully constructed facade of being single, and doing so might incite Lucas' wrath.

"Through...work," Melody mumbled. "We're not very close. I'm just an acquaintance, so don't worry about me."

Stella's smile remained, but her eyes narrowed and did not respond to that.

"What about you?" she asked. "How did you meet Lucas?"

Stella said, "We grew up together. I know him better than anyone. You could even say we were childhood sweethearts!"

Despite having a smile on her face, her eyes were devoid of warmth as she scrutinized Melody's reaction. Alas, she was unable to discern even the slightest fluctuation in expression.

"Oh, so you're both childhood sweethearts," Melody said as she downed the glass of juice in one gulp.

Stella's smile turned somewhat ambiguous. "And we know each other better than anyone."

"Hey, Stella! Over here!" someone called out to her.

At her friend's beckoning, she patted Melody on the shoulder and walked over to the people who called her.

Left alone again, Melody felt as if she was disassociated with the part around her. She felt uncomfortable, so she silently left the room since Luccas did not seem to need her either.

Once she escaped the stifling room and wandered back to the main hall, she sought solace in a quiet corner. Leaning against the balcony railing, she gazed at the glittering cityscape below. The world seemed like a beautiful place to be, yet it also felt distant, like a life she could never reach.

A person's fate seemed to be preordained by their circumstances at birth. Stella, for example, was beautiful and talented. After entering the entertainment circle, her acting earned her the admiration of many fans, and her acting career progressed without any hitches.

By contrast, Melody was an ordinary nobody. Nevertheless, she shook off that feeling, knowing that the money she would earn after a year of playing wife would allow her to have freedom and a life that she could finally call her own. Earning that money was all that mattered to her at that moment.

As Melody turned to leave, she inadvertently laid eyes on Sherman.