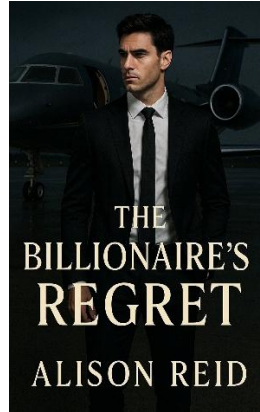


# The Billionaire's Regret

by Alison Reid



Melissa stepped into the living room, leaving behind the hum of laughter and celebration on the terrace. It was her twenty-first birthday—a night that was supposed to be perfect. Yet, as she scanned the room, a flicker of unease crept up her spine.

She had been looking for Michael, her boyfriend of nearly three years. The love of her life. The man she was certain she would spend forever with.

But he wasn't there.

She was sure he asked her to meet him here at this time.

Instead, Brian—his cousin—was standing near the bar, a glass of whiskey in his hand. The dim lighting cast shadows across his face, making his expression unreadable.

“Oh, hello, Brian,” she said, offering a polite smile. “What are you doing in here all alone?”

Brian turned toward her, swirling the amber liquid in his glass. “Needed a break.”

“Oh, okay,” she said, glancing around. “Have you seen Michael?”

He took a slow sip, watching her over the rim of his glass. Then, he took a step closer.

“No, I haven’t.” He tilted his head slightly, studying her. “You and Michael are close, huh?”

Melissa frowned. “Yes, of course. We’ve been together for nearly three years now.”

Brian nodded, his gaze darkening. “You know... I think you’re too good for him.”

She let out a soft laugh, shaking her head. “Don’t be silly.”

But Brian didn’t laugh.

Instead, he stepped closer. Too close.

“You know, I’ve always liked you, Melissa.” His voice was low, almost teasing, but there was something unsettling beneath it.

Melissa forced a polite smile. “Thank you, Brian, but I’m very fond of Michael.” More than fond—she loved him with all her heart.

The sharp scent of whiskey and expensive cologne filled her nose as he set his glass down on the coffee table.

Then, before she could react, he lunged.

“Brian, stop!” she gasped, stumbling back, but he was faster.

His hands gripped her arms, strong and unyielding. “You and I should get together,” he murmured, his voice thick with alcohol and something far more dangerous.

Panic shot through her. “Let me go, Brian.”

He didn’t.

Instead, he shoved her backward, the breath knocking from her lungs as she landed hard on the sofa. His weight followed, pressing her down, trapping her. Her arms were crushed between their bodies, pinned uselessly.

“Brian, please—”

Her words were cut off as his mouth crashed onto hers, rough and punishing. The sharp tang of whiskey invaded her senses, making her stomach turn. She twisted, trying to pull away, but he was relentless.

She tasted blood.

Her own.

Terror paralysed her. She couldn't move. Couldn't scream.

Brian's weight pressed her deeper into the couch, his breath hot and reeking of whiskey as he muttered something against her lips. His hands roamed, gripping her wrists, pinned between their bodies as he ground himself against her.

Melissa froze in horror.

She could feel him.

The hard, unmistakable proof of what he wanted, pressing against her thigh. A violent shudder tore through her, disgust and fear crashing over her in suffocating waves.

"No," she whimpered, her voice barely a breath.

Brian only chuckled darkly, his fingers bruising as he forced her wrists above her head, trapping them there with one hand. His free hand slid lower, past the hem of her dress, his fingers skimming her thigh.

Melissa bucked against him, twisting, fighting, but he was too strong. His body caged hers completely, pinning her down like prey beneath a predator.

Tears burned her eyes.

No, no, no—

Desperation clawed at her chest. Her fingers curled into fists, nails digging into her own palms. He was too strong, but she had to do something—

And then, she felt it.

One hand.

His grip had loosened, just slightly, shifting as he reached for her leg.

It was all she needed.

With every ounce of strength she had, Melissa yanked her hand free and lashed out. Her fingernails raked across Brian's face, catching his cheek, dragging down hard.

His roar of pain was deafening.

He jerked back, clutching his face, blood welling beneath the deep, angry scratches.

Melissa didn't wait.

She shoved him with everything she had, scrambling out from under him. Her heart pounded as she staggered to her feet, gasping for breath.

Brian's glare was murderous, his chest heaving, his lips twisted in rage.

But she didn't care. She had to get away—now.

Melissa shoved off the sofa, her legs trembling beneath her as she bolted toward the stairs. Her breath came in short, panicked gasps, her pulse roaring in her ears. Just a few more steps—

Then a hand grabbed her arm.

She twisted, ready to scream—

“Melissa!”

The familiar voice cut through her panic just in time. It wasn't Brian. It wasn't another threat. It was—

Sarah.

Her sister's eyes were wide with concern, her grip firm but gentle. “What's wrong?” she asked, searching Melissa's face.

That was all it took.

Melissa crumpled. A sob tore from her throat, her body shaking violently as the terror finally consumed her.

Sarah didn't hesitate. Wrapping an arm around Melissa, she guided her quickly upstairs, away from prying eyes, away from him. Once inside her bedroom, she shut the door firmly, locking it before turning back to her sister.

Melissa collapsed onto the edge of the bed, her breaths ragged, her hands shaking uncontrollably. Sarah knelt in front of her, gripping her hands.

"Melissa, talk to me," she pleaded, her voice gentle but urgent. "What happened?"

Melissa tried to speak, but the words got stuck. Her throat felt raw, like she had been screaming even though no sound had come out. She shook her head, tears spilling down her cheeks.

Sarah's brows furrowed, her worry deepening. "I saw Brian come out of the living room after you, was it him?" she asked, her voice low, tense.

Melissa squeezed her eyes shut, more tears escaping as she gave a small, broken nod.

For a moment, Sarah was completely still.

Then, her grip on Melissa's hands tightened. "That bastard." The fury in her voice was sharp, deadly.

Melissa flinched, still trembling.

Sarah exhaled sharply; her fists still clenched as she knelt in front of Melissa. With a shaking breath, she gently brushed the damp hair from her sister's face, her touch at odds with the storm raging in her eyes.

"Did he—did he hurt you?" Her voice wavered slightly, as if she were afraid of the answer.

Melissa hesitated before whispering, "He tried."

A sharp breath left Sarah's lips.

A storm of rage darkened her eyes. She stood abruptly; fists clenched at her sides. "I'm going to kill him."

Melissa's head shot up, panic flashing through her. "No! Please, Sarah, don't—"

But Sarah was already pacing, her entire body vibrating with fury. "He forced himself on you," she spat, her voice shaking. "In our house. On your birthday." She whirled around, eyes blazing. "He needs to pay for this. I swear to God, Melissa, I'll—"

Melissa grabbed her wrist, her grip desperate. "Please don't. I just—I just want to forget."

Sarah stared at her, her expression torn between heartbreak and rage.

Then, slowly, she sat back down beside Melissa and pulled her into a tight embrace.

"I won't let him get away with this," she whispered, her voice unbreakable. "I promise you."

Melissa buried her face in her sister's shoulder, sobbing quietly. Her entire body trembled, the shock still rattling through her bones.

"Please, no," she choked out between shaky breaths. "Just—just find Michael. Bring him here. I need him."

Sarah hesitated for only a second before nodding. "Of course. I'll be back soon."

She pulled away and hurried out of the room, leaving Melissa alone, wrapped in a suffocating silence. She curled in on herself, hugging her arms tightly around her body, as if that could hold her together.

Minutes passed. Then longer. Sarah was gone for what felt like forever.

When the door finally opened, Melissa sat up quickly, her heart pounding. But one look at Sarah's face sent a fresh wave of panic through her.

Her sister looked... uneasy. Troubled.

Melissa's stomach clenched. "Where's Michael?" she whispered, her voice raw.

Sarah hesitated.

Then, carefully, she said, "He left."

Melissa blinked. "What?" She shook her head, gripping the blanket around her shoulders. "No, he—he wouldn't just leave. Why would he—"

Sarah bit her lip, looking like she was struggling to find the right words. "I don't know, Mel." She sighed. "I looked everywhere. He's gone."

Melissa felt like the air had been sucked from her lungs.

Gone?

He left?

Without saying goodbye.

She shook her head again, refusing to believe it. "No," she whispered. "He wouldn't do that. He wouldn't leave me."

But Sarah's expression didn't change.

Melissa's chest caved in, the weight of those two words—He left—suffocating her.

She thought she had been broken before.

But this? This was a different kind of pain.

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