

The Ruined Bride of Velvet Nights by Brick Moving Ant

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The day before my final audition for the School of American Ballet, I was dragged into a secluded part of Central Park by a group of thugs who tortured me for twenty–four hours.

When they found me, my legs were broken and my face was covered in blood.

Dad missed my frantic calls because he was “stuck in meetings.” When he finally saw me in the hospital, his tears seemed real enough.

Caspian called his friends at Columbia Medical Center, pulling strings for emergency surgery.

Drifting in and out of consciousness in the car ride from the hospital, I caught fragments of a whispered conversation.

“Dad, we went way too far with this Valentina situation,” Caspian muttered. “I get that you want to clear Victoria’s path to SAB, but having Valentina attacked? There had to be another way.”

Dad was cradling me in the backseat, his fingers mechanically brushing hair from my forehead as he replied.

“Victoria deserves that spot at SAB. Your sister has been outshining her for years, making Victoria

feel second–rate. With the limited spots available this year, we needed to make sure Val couldn’t

audition.”

“Still,” he added with chilling pragmatism, “making Valentina the Dagonet heir should make up for it, don’t you think?”

A violent tremor seized my body, my breath catching in raw, painful gasps. The world I thought I knew crumbled around me, replaced by a cold, terrifying reality.

The Dagonet family I thought I belonged to–the father who cheered at my recitals, the brother who threatened my first boyfriend–it was all a calculated lie...

“Patient’s condition is critical. The team is prepped and ready. Should we proceed with emergency surgery?” the doctor asked, looking directly at my father.

“Let’s wait until tomorrow,” Dad replied coolly.

The doctor’s jaw literally dropped. “Mr. Dagonet, both her legs have been severely fractured.

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Without immediate surgical intervention, the bones won’t align properly. She’ll have a permanent

limp.”

Caspian stepped forward, placing a hand on Dad’s shoulder. “Dad, seriously? Val’s only seventeen. We can’t let her spend the rest of her life with a limp.”

“That’s exactly what I want!” Dad hissed, his mask slipping for just a moment. “We’ve come this far. I need to make absolutely certain Victoria’s audition goes off without a hitch. The only way Victoria won’t constantly feel threatened is if Valentina can never dance again.”

He straightened his Brooks Brothers tie. “Just have the doctor apply medication for now.”

I lay on the hospital bed, biting my lip until I tasted blood, but couldn’t stop the sob that escaped my

throat.

My father–who’d taken me to every recital, who’d built me my own practice studio in our Hamptons house–now terrified me beyond words.

Everything clicked into place. Dad’s sudden devotion after Mom died wasn’t grief or guilt.

He was systematically destroying my future to pave the way for his secret daughter!

And Caspian–my protector, my confidant–cared more about Victoria than his own sister.

The two men I’d trusted with my life were brutally sacrificing me for the same woman.

Each realization hit like a physical blow, and I broke into a painful coughing fit.

Dad rushed to my bedside, all concerned father again, gently dabbing tears from my cheeks. “Nightmare, sweetheart? Don’t worry, Daddy’s right here,” he murmured, his voice honey–sweet.

He rubbed small circles on my back, reciting lines from The Nutcracker like he did when I was little.

Dad, the perfect performer–he’d always known exactly how to appear devoted in front of an

audience.

Meanwhile, Caspian charged back in with the doctor: “Get the premium pain management package! My sister shouldn’t feel a thing!”

Their concern seemed so real, so genuine.

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Yet they’d been orchestrating my downfall all along.

My chest tightened painfully; dark spots swam at the edges of my vision.

The doctor moved efficiently, cutting away my leggings with trauma shears to assess the damage underneath.

“Val, honey, your injuries are extremely severe,” Dad explained, his voice gentle. “I’m concerned about rushing into surgery. Wouldn’t it be better to wait for Dr. Leibowitz to fly in tomorrow? He’s the top orthopedic surgeon on the East Coast.”

“Don’t worry, princess. Daddy promises you’ll dance again!”

A tear slid down my temple into my hair.

“Dad,” I whispered, “will I really be able to dance again?”

Dad hesitated, his eyes flickering away from mine.

After a weighted silence, he sighed. “Valentina, have I ever broken a promise to you?”

My legs had long since gone numb, but what choice did I have?

I lowered my gaze in submission. “I understand. We’ll wait for Dr. Leibowitz.”

Dad smiled that million–dollar smile. “That’s my girl...”

His words cut off abruptly as the doctor peeled back the fabric from my shins. Dad’s face drained of

color.

“Jesus Christ!”

The thugs had made a game of it, competing to see who could hurt me most creatively.

Below my knees: compound fractures, tissue damage, exposed bone.

Caspian turned away, hand over his mouth.

The doctor whispered something that might have been a prayer. “These injuries... this was methodical. Miss Dagonet, I’m going to administer pain medication now. This might sting initially...”

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I slowly shook my head. “Don’t bother...”

Because I couldn’t feel anything anymore–physically or emotionally.

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