

The Ruined Bride of Velvet Nights by Brick Moving Ant

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“You’ll walk normally with proper physical therapy,” the Swiss surgeon explained. “But professional ballet is unfortunately no longer possible.”

With those words, my dream of returning to the stage evaporated completely.

Over espresso on the clinic’s terrace, Grand–père revealed a stunning truth: he had quietly bankrolled Dad’s startup years ago, channeling millions through shell companies.

“I thought I was helping Élise,” he said, his accent thickening with emotion. “Instead, I financed the lifestyle that allowed Maxwell to pursue Camilla while my daughter withered away.”

His weathered hands trembled slightly as he set down his cup. “Not only am I liquidating every Rousseau investment in Dagonet Industries, but I’ve instructed our board to systematically acquire their competitors. Your father’s company won’t survive the quarter.”

For three months, I underwent intensive rehabilitation in the private Alpine clinic.

Those first nights were torture—even with pharmaceutical–grade sedatives, I’d wake up screaming, feeling phantom hands breaking my bones all over again.

Grand–père would appear within moments, taking the chair beside my bed to share what little he knew of my mother’s brief time with the Rousseaus.

His stories felt maddeningly incomplete—he could only describe how she color–coded her notes at university, how she would practice her ballet positions while waiting for elevators, how she never abandoned a goal once she’d set her mind to it.

Our roles gradually reversed. I found myself filling in the twenty years he’d missed—her silent 3 a.m. crying sessions in the kitchen when she thought everyone was asleep, the way she’d flinch whenever Dad raised his voice, how she’d spend hours perfecting my ballet buns because it reminded her of her own shattered dreams.

Grand–père listened intently, his eyes growing heavier with each story. “I will never forgive myself for failing Élise,” he finally said. “That debt remains unpayable. But you, Valentina—I’ve restructured everything. The entire Rousseau Group will pass to you alone.”

I remained silent, wondering if perhaps Mom had simply exchanged one toxic family dynamic for another. Had Grand–père once favored his adopted daughter just as Dad had chosen Victoria? Was

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that why Mom had cut all ties?

Those answers died with her.

After the third reconstructive surgery, I studied my reflection in the mirror. The scars had virtually disappeared.

But the surgeons had done something else—something I’d specifically requested.

Before, I’d been unmistakably Maxwell Dagonet’s daughter. “Carbon copy” was the phrase everyone used.

Now, every trace of that resemblance had been methodically erased.

“Do I look like my mother now?” I asked the surgeon.

“The bone structure, the eye shape—yes, you favor Madame Élise considerably more,” he confirmed.

Perfect. I’d severed the last physical connection to the Dagonet name.

When I finally powered on my phone after three months, a cascade of notifications nearly crashed the device.

Somehow Dad had traced this number. During my silence, he and Caspian had bombarded me with increasingly frantic messages:

[Val, please just let us know you’re alive. I haven’t slept in days. The police think you might have harmed yourself.]

[I was a monster. I see that now. I chose Victoria over my own daughter. I let those men hurt you. I can never undo what I’ve done, but please don’t punish yourself for my sins.]

[Your room is exactly as you left it. I sit there every night. Those Misty Copeland posters you wanted that I said were too expensive? I covered your ceiling with them. Please come home.]

Caspian had gone public with a series of raw confession videos that had gone viral across every platform, detailing his role in my destruction while sobbing uncontrollably.

“They’re destroying themselves,” Grand–père observed dispassionately over breakfast. “Your father has abandoned board meetings to search for you. Dagonet stock has plummeted 68% in three months. They’ve had to lay off hundreds of employees.”

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I spread marmalade on my toast, unmoved. “How unfortunate for them.”

Despite my continued silence, the messages arrived daily, growing increasingly desperate.

Through them, I learned the aftermath of my security footage leak. The public reaction had been nuclear.

Initially, Victoria had been America’s sweetheart—the innocent victim of her psychotic stepsister. #ProtectVictoria had trended for days.

When the hospital surveillance video exposed her elaborate scheme, the backlash was catastrophic. She’d been forced to withdraw from SAB after death threats. Camilla Winters had taken her into hiding somewhere in Europe.

I set down my phone. Their drama felt like a movie I’d walked out of halfway—someone else could worry about the ending.

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