

The Ruined Bride of Velvet Nights by Brick Moving Ant

Chapter 117

I stood up, brushing imaginary dust from my Hermès skirt.

“Security will escort you out. If you ever approach the Rousseau name again, I'll personally ensure you're prosecuted for every cent you stole.”

She left screaming obscenities, vowing revenge.

I wasn't remotely concerned. I had inherited not just Grand-père's fortune, but his network of influence as well.

In his final days, Grand-père's hospital suite overlooked the same Mediterranean waters that had enchanted my mother as a child.

During his lucid moments, he taught me about the business empire I would inherit. During others, he spoke to me as if I were Élise, recounting happy memories I'd never heard before.

“Remember when you performed Swan Lake in the garden? Your mother was furious about the ruined roses, but I couldn't stop applauding.”

I didn't correct him. Instead, I held his hand and asked for more stories—collecting precious fragments of my mother's life that had been lost to me.

Between these tender moments, I explored the estate, discovering my mother's childhood—her ballet slippers still in her closet, diaries filled with teenage dreams, photographs of her laughing by the same pool where I now swam daily.

News reached me that Caspian had died during a prison riot, his skull crushed by another inmate. Dad had received thirty years without parole, his health already failing in maximum security.

When I mentioned these developments to Grand-père, he simply nodded.

“The universe rights itself eventually,” he murmured.

On Grand-père's final evening, as Mediterranean sunset painted his room in gold, he squeezed my hand with surprising strength.

“Tell me, ma chérie,” he whispered, “did Élise speak of me before she left this world?”

I rested my head gently on his shoulder, as I imagined my mother might have done, and answered truthfully.

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Chapter 11

“Mom did have something she wanted to tell you before she died,” I said, gently adjusting the cashmere blanket around his shoulders.

Grand-père's eyes fluttered open, a flicker of hope crossing his weathered face. “She thought of us at the end? What were her words, chérie?”

I gazed at him—this powerful man now so fragile against the Egyptian cotton pillows—and smiled softly.

“I think I'll keep that between Mom and me.”

His expression transformed from confusion to understanding. Tears welled in his eyes, but then, remarkably, he began to laugh—a gentle, knowing laugh.

“Oh, Valentina,” he whispered, reaching for my hand. “You are so much like her. The same quiet strength. The same beautiful defiance.”

His breathing slowed as he drifted deeper. “Élise, my little ballerina... Papa's waiting for you in the garden... your pirouettes were always... perfect...”

Grand-père's hand gradually relaxed in mine as he slipped away, peacefully reuniting with the daughter he had lost twice.

The truth? Mom had indeed left a message. She had told me, on that final night in our Manhattan apartment, that she had forgiven her parents. That understanding comes with time. That resentment is too heavy a suitcase to carry through life.

But that forgiveness was hers to give, not mine to deliver.

Some debts remain unpayable, some words better left unspoken.

At thirty, as the sole heir to the Rousseau empire, my life bears no resemblance to the broken girl who once pleaded for her father's love. The corporate headquarters in Paris, the vineyard in Bordeaux, the jet, the yacht moored in Monaco's harbor—all mine to command.

Yet the possessions mean little compared to the freedom they provide.

Some mornings I wake at dawn to swim in the Mediterranean before breakfast on the terrace. Some

evenings I fly to Milan just for dinner. Sometimes I disappear for months to photograph wildlife in places where no one knows my name or fortune.

My physical scars have faded to barely visible silver lines, revealed only in certain light.

The emotional wounds have been slower to heal, but even they have lost their sharp edges.

I take my time with everything now. Recovery. Decisions. Trust.

What I no longer do is seek approval or validation. I don't measure my worth through others' eyes.

I've learned—perhaps the hardest way possible—to love myself completely and without condition.

And just as Mom whispered to me in those final moments, I live each day brilliantly, fiercely, and entirely on my own terms.

Not as Valentina Dagonet. Not even as Valentina Rousseau. Simply as myself.

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