

Trading My Ex for His Uncle

C 1171

"Exactly, Mr. Sumner, please help us out!"

Damon's expression remained indifferent while facing the hopeful gazes of the group. "I can help you, but tell me what can you offer in return?"

He wasn't a philanthropist, and given these people had previously worked against Prospectus Technology, there was no way he would let them off easily.

"Mr. Sumner, whatever you ask—if we can do it, we will!"

The others echoed in agreement, desperate to save their businesses.

Damon nodded. "Alright, I have only one condition—join me in taking down Drake."

Relief washed over the group. Some even looked incredulous.

Was that really his only condition? After all, even if Damon hadn't explicitly asked, they'd likely side with him against Drake once their companies were back on their feet.

The humiliation Drake had subjected them to was a bitter pill none of them were willing to swallow.

"Mr. Sumner, that's it? That's all you're asking?"

Damon turned his cold gaze to the man who spoke. "Yes. But let me make this clear—I don't give second chances, let alone thirds. If any of you betray me, I guarantee your companies will be bankrupt within three days."

The group's faces paled. They knew Damon now controlled their key partnerships, and with that leverage, he could crush their businesses effortlessly.

"Don't worry, Mr. Sumner. We'll stand by you against Drake."

"Exactly! Drake's made fools of us all—we won't let him get away with it!"

"As long as you save our companies, we're at your service."

Damon nodded. "Good. I hope you remember the promises you made today."

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Two hours later, the group left the office, their faces alight with satisfaction, clutching newly signed contracts.

Although they had sacrificed a portion of their profits, keeping their businesses afloat was all that mattered now.

Spencer organized the contracts and filed them away before knocking and entering Damon's office "Mr. Sumner, should we stop monitoring the others now that the contracts are signed?"

"No, keep the surveillance. A signed contract means nothing on its own. Some of them may still harbor ill intentions and try to work with Drake in secret," Damon instructed

"Understood. I'll make sure the monitoring continues," Spencer replied.

"Good. Carry on," Damon dismissed.

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At 1:50 p.m., Nyla's car pulled up to the agreed-upon restaurant.

As soon as she stepped out, Alexander, seated by the window, turned to Emerald. "Aunt Emerald, that's Nyla. Doesn't she look just like you did when you were younger?"

Alexander had seen photos of Emerald in her youth. The resemblance between her and Nyla was striking-at least 70-80%.

Among Emerald's three children, Nyla bore the closest resemblance to her.

"Mm," Emerald hummed flatly, her expression devoid of emotion.

To her, Nyla's resemblance or lack thereof-was irrelevant. What mattered was taking her back to Meristate.

"I called my dad the other day," Alexander said. "He said Nyla's personality is almost identical to yours when you were younger. He said you're definitely mother and daughter."

Emerald turned to him, her voice icy. "If you're trying to make me feel more maternal before the meeting, you can stop now."

"Aunt Emerald, I just hope this meeting doesn't turn hostile," Alexander replied.

Emerald's expression remained cold. "That depends on her attitude."

Alexander sighed inwardly. Given Emerald and Nyla's personalities, it was hard to imagine the meeting going smoothly.

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A moment later, Nyla entered the restaurant.

Alexander stood quickly and led her toward their table.

"Nyla, just a heads-up-your mom's used to giving orders, so her words might come across as commanding. Be prepared," he said again, his tone cautious.

"Okay," Nyla replied evenly, following him.

In less than two minutes, they arrived at the table.

"Nyla, this is your mom," Alexander said, then turned to the woman sitting before them. "Aunt Emerald, this is Nyla. Doesn't she look just like you?"

Emerald and Nyla's eyes met, neither speaking for several long moments.

After what felt like an eternity, Emerald raised her chin slightly. "Sit down."

Her tone was devoid of any warmth.

As Nyla looked at the woman in front of her, she found it impossible to reconcile this commanding figure with the gentle, loving mother she remembered from childhood.

She sat across from Emerald and spoke directly. "I've heard from Alexander that you want me to go to Meristate."

Emerald nodded, her gaze sharp and appraising. "If you come with me, I'll let you inherit the Nixon fortune. You'll have wealth beyond measure and the ability to obtain anything you desire with ease."

She spoke as if offering a prize no one could refuse, expecting Nyla to be moved.

However, Nyla's expression remained calm. "Anything I desire?"

Emerald considered her response for a moment, then nodded. "Yes."

"Then I want the past 20 years of a mother's love. Can you give me that?" Nyla asked.

Emerald frowned slightly, a flicker of confusion crossing her face. It seemed she hadn't anticipated such a "foolish" response.

"I came here expecting more from you, but see now I was wrong. If you were even a little smarter, you wouldn't have said something so ridiculous," Emerald remarked, her tone dripping with disdain

Nyla chuckled softly. "Ms. Kinsey, wealth may mean the world to you, but to me, it's just numbers. It's no different from how you can't seem to understand what I truly value."

The woman sitting before her was nothing more than a stranger who happened to share her mother's face.

Any hope Nyla had held onto of finding even a shred of motherly love in Emerald had vanished.

Perhaps that was for the best. It would save her from any inner conflict when the inevitable confrontation came.

Emerald's expression hardened.

"What you want is irrelevant to me. You have two choices—come with me willingly, or I'll force you to go. If you resist, I'll bankrupt Prospectus Technology as a small punishment—to show you the cost of defying me."

Nyla clenched her fists under the table, a flicker of coldness flashing in her eyes.

Sensing the rising tension, Alexander quickly interjected, "Aunt Emerald, isn't that going too far? This is your first meeting with Nyla after so

many years. You should focus on

reconnecting, not scaring her. Didn't you tell me you missed her and were excited about this reunion?"

Emerald frowned. "When did I ever say that?"

Alexander went silent.

"I can go with you to Meristate," Nyla said suddenly.

Alexander and Emerald turned their attention to her.

She met Emerald's gaze directly and repeated, "I'll agree to go and inherit the Nixons, as you've planned. But I have three conditions."

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Emerald looked at Nyla and asked, "What are your conditions?"

"First, Buddy stays in Saintornia. He can't come to Meristate with me. Second, I need you to provide resources to Damon's company to help him take it international. Third, I want full control over my marriage decisions," Nyla stated firmly.

Emerald narrowed her eyes and pondered briefly before letting out a soft laugh. "Once you join the Nixons, you and Damon will belong to two entirely different worlds.

"As for Buddy—if you leave him here, his life trajectory will end up just like yours. Are you sure you want to leave him behind?"

Nyla's second condition wasn't difficult for Emerald to guess. She could see where this was heading, though Nyla clearly underestimated the Nixons. Even with abundant resources, Damon could never compete with them.

As for Nyla's third condition? Once she was in Meristate, who she wanted to marry would hardly be her decision to make.

"I'm sure," Nyla said resolutely. "You want me to go to Meristate because you need a pawn. I refuse to let my son become one too."

"Naive," Emerald spat.

Whether it was Mason or Damon, Emerald knew either man could be used to control Nyla if necessary.

From the moment Emerald decided to bring her to Meristate, Nyla's autonomy ceased to exist. The only variable would be whether she complied willingly or resisted until it proved futile.

"Just tell me whether you agree to my conditions. Whether my decision is naive or not is irrelevant to you," Nyla retorted.

Emerald frowned, clearly displeased with Nyla's defiance.

How Harrison had managed to raise such a headstrong daughter was beyond her comprehension. Once Nyla arrived in Meristate, Emerald vowed to teach her proper manners.

"Fine. I agree. When will you be ready to leave for Meristate?" she asked.

"I'll need time to say goodbye to Damon and Buddy," Nyla replied.

"Three days. That's all you get. I'm very busy and can't waste my time here," Emerald decided curtly.

Nyla's face paled slightly. After a long pause, she finally nodded. "Okay."

"I'll have Alexander deliver your

ticket. See you at the airport in three days." With that, Emerald grabbed

her bag and left without another word. .

The silence that followed was broken by Alexander. "Why did you suddenly change your mind?"

Before today, he had assumed the two would reach a stalemate. Yet, in a matter of minutes, everything had been resolved.

Earlier, Nyla had been steadfast in her refusal to go to Meristate. What had changed?

"It doesn't matter why I changed my mind. The outcome is what's important," Nyla answered.

Alexander frowned. Although he had come to convince her to go, her sudden agreement unsettled him.

"You should think carefully. Things are complicated with the Nixons. You might face challenges you can't foresee," he cautioned.

Nyla chuckled, her eyes glinting with faint sarcasm. "Mr. Kinsey, weren't you the one encouraging me to go earlier? Now you're telling me to think twice? So, what is it that you really want-for me to go, or to

stay?"

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"I want you to understand the full picture before making a decision," Alexander replied.

"It doesn't seem like I have much of a choice," Nyla remarked.

Alexander was rendered speechless. Emerald's domineering nature had left no room for negotiation.

After a moment, he finally said,

"Don't worry too much. The Nixons are complicated, yes, but my dad and I will help you. That said, leaving Buddy behind might mean you'll never see him again."

Chapter 1174

Seeing the flicker of guilt in Alexander's expression, Nyla said, "If you really feel sorry for Buddy and me, promise me one thing."

"What is it?" Alexander asked.

"If I ever ask for your help after going to Meristate, you have to help me no matter what," Nyla said.

Alexander smiled. "You might find that once you become the Nixons' successor, I'll be the one asking you for help."

"So, is that a no?" Nyla asked.

Seeing her serious expression, Alexander finally nodded. "Fine, I promise."

"Let's hope you won't break your word," she replied.

Alexander offered, "If you don't believe me, I can swear on my life."

Nyla shook her head. "That won't be necessary. I have other things to do, so I'll be leaving now."

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Nyla headed straight to Prospectus Technology.

Damon was surprised to see her arrive unexpectedly. "Nyla, why are you here at this hour?"

"I missed you, so I came to see you," Nyla answered.

Her gaze was tender, filled with love-and a hint of sorrow so subtle it was almost imperceptible.

Damon, ever perceptive, quickly noticed something was off. He approached her and asked, "Did something happen?"

Nyla shook her head. "Nothing at all. I'm just tired. You go back to work. I'll read here for a while, and we'll pick up Buddy together later tonight."

"No, something's wrong. Nyla, whatever it is, just tell me. Don't keep it bottled up. We're husband and wife. We're supposed to be honest with each other," Damon urged.

"It's really nothing. If there's anything at all, it's that I missed you and wanted to see you. Is that not allowed?" she asked.

"Of course it's allowed. I just don't want you to carry anything heavy on your own," he reminded.

Nyla dismissed it. "Nothing's wrong, really. You should get back to work. Otherwise, I'll head home now so I don't interrupt you."

As she turned toward the door, Damon reached out and pulled her into his arms.

"I don't mind being interrupted by you," he said.

Nyla tilted her head to look at him, about to respond, but he lowered his head and kissed her deeply. Her hands moved to wrap around his neck, returning the kiss with equal fervor.

It felt like an eternity before Damon finally left Nyla's lips. She was panting, her face flushed, as she

said, "You should go back to work, or you'll have to work overtime again tonight."

Damon stared at her. "Do you think I'm still in the mood to work?"

He carried her into the adjacent lounge. Once the door closed, he pinned her against it and kissed her again.

They gradually moved to the bed.

Damon was about to continue when Nyla put a hand against his chest.

"You're not wearing that..."

Nyla rarely visited Prospectus Technology, so there weren't any condoms kept in the room.

Damon held her waist and coaxed, "It's safe today."

Nyla was going to say more but was silenced by his kisses.

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Two hours later, Damon emerged, looking utterly satisfied.

Inside, Nyla felt sore all over. She

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checked the time and realized it was nearly time to pick up Mason.

Ignoring her aching body, she forced herself to get dressed.

Her hands and legs trembled as she moved.

"Damon, you beast!" she muttered under her breath.

He hadn't given her a single moment to rest in those two hours!

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After getting dressed and stepping out of the break room, Nyla spotted Damon sitting behind his desk, looking refreshed as he worked.

She shot him a glare, unable to suppress her annoyance.

Damon rubbed his nose, feeling a bit guilty. "Honey, why didn't you rest a little longer?"

"It's almost time to pick up Buddy from school. Are you still busy with work?" Nyla asked.

"There's just a little left to do, but I can finish it at home. Let me grab my things, and we'll pick up Buddy together," he answered.

Nyla considered telling him to stay and finish his work but remembered they only had three days left together. She nodded. "Okay, I'll wait for you."

Five minutes later, they were on their way downstairs.

Since Nyla had driven over, Damon decided to take her car to pick up Mason.

During the ride, Nyla stared out the window, lost in thought about how to tell Damon she'd be leaving for Meristate.

Damon noticed something was off but didn't press her. He figured he'd wait until after dinner to find the right moment to ask about it.

They soon arrived at Mason's kindergarten.

Mason was already waiting by the entrance. When he saw Nyla's car, he wiggled free from his teacher's hand and ran over.

Opening the back door and noticing Damon behind the wheel, Mason's eyes widened. "Daddy, how come you're here to pick me up today?"

As Mason climbed into the car and buckled his seatbelt, Damon smiled. "Your mom and I decided to come together."

"Oh, guess what? I got a gold star today at school!" Mason said excitedly, holding out the star for Nyla to see. "Mommy, isn't that awesome?"

Nyla smiled and nodded. "Very awesome! Why did your teacher give you a gold star?"

"During naptime, Thomas kept

pulling Lifith's braids, so I told the teacher. She scolded Thomas and gave me a gold star!" Masono recounted.

Upon seeing the pride on Mason's face, Nyla's heart warmed.

When they had lived in Capitarnia, Mason had always been calm and maturez While she'd appreciated his steadiness, she'd worried he was missing the carefree innocence of a child his age.

Since moving to Saintornia, he'd become much more lively, acting more like a typical five-year-old.

"Buddy, you're amazing! Since your teacher gave you a gold star, Mommy wants to give you a reward, too," Nyla said.

Mason's eyes lit up. "What is it?"

"What do you want?" Nyla asked.

Mason's small face scrunched up as he thought hard. He wanted so many things that he couldn't decide.

After a moment, he looked up at Nyla. "Mommy, can I only pick one?"

Nyla thought for a moment and smiled. "Here's an idea. Write down everything you want in a notebook and give it to me. I'll pick one as surprise. That way, you'll still get what you want but also feel excited when you open the gift. What do you think?"

Mason's eyes sparkled with excitement. He nodded eagerly. "Okay! I'll start writing as soon as we get home!"

"Alright," Nyla replied.

Buoyed by the thought of his reward, Mason was in high spirits for the rest of the drive.

As soon as they reached home, he jumped out of the car and ran straight inside, eager to grab a notebook and start his list.

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Watching Mason dash away, Nyla couldn't help but smile. But that smile quickly faded as she thought about their imminent separation.

"Nyla, why are you staring after Buddy like that?" Damon's voice snapped her back to reality.

She turned to him, quickly masking her sadness. "Oh, nothing. I was just thinking about how fast time flies. Buddy's already five years old."

Damon slid an arm around her waist. "It might feel fast to you, but not to me. When I think about the five years we lost, I can't help but feel regret. If we'd been together all that time, the three of us would've been so happy."

The mention of those lost years made Nyla sigh.

If only she had trusted Damon more back then, they wouldn't have missed out on so much time together.

And now, just as they had reunited, they were about to be separated again.

"I'm sorry, Damon..." she murmured.

Seeing the guilt in her eyes, Damon pulled her into his arms, his voice soft.

"There's nothing to apologize for. For me, as long as I'm with you and Buddy, it's never too late."

"Mm," Nyla hummed in response.

Leaning against Damon, she felt tears welling up in her eyes.

How was she supposed to tell him she was leaving?

She knew he'd be angry and wouldn't agree to it. But to protect Prospectus Technology, to protect him and Mason, she had no choice.

If she agreed to go to Meristate, Prospectus Technology could thrive. Perhaps, one day, it could even surpass the Nixons, giving them a chance to reunite.

If Prospectus Technology fell and she and Mason were forcibly taken, they'd lose any hope of being together again.

After staying in Damon's embrace for a while, Nyla composed herself and pulled away.

She wiped at the corners of her eyes and smiled. "I just got a little emotional thinking about the time we lost."

Though Damon could tell there was more to her words, he didn't press her. "Let's head inside," he suggested.

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After dinner, Mason retreated to his room, eager to work on his list.

Nyla stayed in the living room, planning to watch TV while waiting for him, but Damon had other plans.

"Nyla, come to the study for a minute," he asked.

She followed him into the room, puzzled. "What's wrong, Damon? Do you need something?"

Damon turned to face her, his expression serious. "It's not about me. It's about you. Something's been bothering you since this afternoon. What's going on?"

Nyla bit her lip, avoiding his gaze. "Nothing's wrong."

"It's

Damon's mother, isn't it?"

asked Spencer

her day and learned she'd meet

Emerald in the afternoon.

Since her mood had changed after that meeting, it had to be related.

"It's nothing. Don't overthink it. I'm just tired," Nyla denied.

Damon stared at her silently, disbelief clear in his eyes.

Under his gaze, Nyla's resolve began to crumble.

After a

pause, she finally

promised not to get involved

Okay, I'll tell you. But you can't

or

stop me."

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Damon interrupted her, his voice low and firm, "You're planning to go to Meristate, aren't you?"

Nyla clenched the fabric of her shirt. After a long moment, she nodded. "Yes." The words had barely left her mouth when Damon grabbed her shoulders. "What about me? You're leaving with Buddy-what am I supposed to do?" he demanded.

Looking up at his reddened eyes, Nyla trembled, unsure how to respond.

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"Damon, I'm sorry, but I don't have another choice," Nyla apologized.

"What do you mean you don't have a choice? You didn't even ask or discuss it with me-you just decided to leave on your own. You didn't think about how I'd feel at all. How could you be so selfish?" Damon demanded.

Nyla stared at him, shocked, her eyes welling with tears. "Would it have mattered if I asked you? You can barely handle Drake, let alone fight against the Nixons!"

Damon let out a bitter laugh, his hands falling from her shoulders as he took a step back. "So... it's my fault. If I weren't so useless, I'd be able to protect you and Buddy."

Seeing the pain in his expression, Nyla reached out to him. "Damon, that's not what I meant-"

He pulled his hand away, his voice cold. "It doesn't matter what you meant. The result is the same-you and Buddy go to Meristate, and I stay here. If you had already made your decision, why did we even get married?"

Nyla took a deep breath, meeting his eyes. "I won't take Buddy to Meristate."

Damon stared at her in disbelief. "You're abandoning Buddy too now?"

"How could I abandon you and Buddy?" she said, frowning. "But right now, the only way to protect both of you is for me to leave with Emerald."

"It's not the only way, Nyla! You're giving up before it's even the final moment," Damon protested.

"Damon, stop saying things just to sound noble. Yes, it's not the last moment yet, but we both know how this will end if I don't agree to her terms. Prospectus Technology will go bankrupt, and Buddy and I will be forced to leave.

"At least this way, I can protect you and Buddy. You can stay here and keep building Prospectus Technology. We'll have a chance to be together again," Nyla countered.

Damon let out another bitter laugh. "When? A month? A year? Ten years?"

"However long it takes, there will be

a day when we reunite. She isn't taking me to Meristate to let me inherit the Nixons. I'm sure she's just using me as a shield to pave the way for her children," Nyla reasoned.

"Then why will you go if you know that?" Damon retorted.

"Damon, it doesn't matter whether I agree or not I have to go. The only difference is whether I go willingly or under duress.

"I negotiated with her today, and she

agreed to provide Prospectus Technology with resources. You

need to use those to grow

Prospectus Technology and expand it to the point that even the Nixons have to take notice. Then we'll have the power to negotiate with them," Nyla coaxed.

At present, they didn't even have the right to sit at the table.

Damon closed his eyes. When he opened them again, his emotions were gone, replaced by a steely calm. "I'm not comfortable with you going to Meristate alone."

"You don't need to worry about that. If she wants to use me as a shield, she'll make sure I'm safe-for now at least. As long as I keep myself useful, she won't let anything happen to me. Once I'm there, I'll figure out more about the Nixons' internal power dynamics, Nyla reassured.

If Emerald could use her, she could also use Emerald's status to learn who in the family could be allies or threats.

What Emerald wanted was for Nyla to pave the way for her children, while what Nyla wanted was to be with Damon and Mason.

"Nyla... I'm sorry. If I weren't so powerless, you wouldn't have to do this," Damon said again.

Nyla shook her head. "Even if you weren't here, she'd still come for me. But now, with you and Buddy, I'm stronger. I'll work hard, and we'll have our day together again."

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Damon nodded. "Alright. I'll do everything I can to grow Prospectus Technology. I'll bring you back."

Nyla couldn't help but smile. "Good. Don't look so serious. After all, she is still my mom. She wouldn't go that far."

Damon forced a small smile. "When are you leaving?"

"In three days," Nyla answered.

"That soon?" Damon asked.

"Yes. So I want to spend these next three days with you and Buddy," Nyla replied.

Damon nodded. "I'll clear my schedule for the next three days. I'll also call Buddy's kindergarten to excuse him from class."

"Okay," Nyla replied.

Just then, there was a knock at the door, followed by Mason's voice. "Mommy? Are you in there? I finished my list!"

Nyla quickly wiped her tears and said, "I'm here, Buddy! Wait for me in the living room. I'll be right out."

She turned to Damon and said, "I'll go check on Buddy. Finish up here and join us when you're done."

Damon nodded silently, and Nyla left the study.

After a quick stop in the bathroom to wash her face and compose herself, she joined Mason in the living room. He was sitting on the couch, holding a small notebook.

As soon as he saw her, he held it out eagerly. "Mommy, here! This is my list of rewards I want!"

Nyla took the notebook and laughed softly at the 20 or so items scribbled on the pages. "Buddy, you've got quite the list here. I'll need time to think about which reward to give you."

"Go upstairs, take a bath, and get ready for bed. When you wake up tomorrow, your reward will be waiting on your nightstand."

"Really?" he asked excitedly.

"Have I ever lied to you? Go on now," Nyla urged.

Mason chirped, "Okay!"

After Mason raced upstairs, Nyla sat on the couch and went through his list carefully.

When she saw one of his wishes to go on an outing with both Mommy and Daddy-her eyes lingered, and an idea began to form.

Back in the study, Damon made a call to Spencer. "Clear my schedule for the next three days. Postpone everything. If it can't be postponed, cancel it."

"Mr. Sumner, you've got important meetings with major clients tomorrow and the day after. We've been arranging these for months. If we cancel now, we might lose the deals," Spencer informed him

Damon replied, "I have more important things to handle. Cancel them."

"Mr. Sumner-" Spencer tried.

"Spencer, I don't want to repeat myself," Damon interrupted.

Hearing the edge in Damon's tone, Spencer had no choice but to agree. "Understood, sir."

"Good. Inform Mr. Keane to oversee operations for the next three days. No matter what happens, I don't want to be disturbed," Damon instructed.

This stunned Spencer. In all the years he had worked with Damon he had never seen him set aside work for anything. Still, he managed a hesitant reply. "Mr. Sumner, is everything alright?"

Damon's tone remained cold. "Just do as I said."

After ending the call, Damon contacted Mason's kindergarten to arrange his absence. Then, lost in thought, he stared out at the night sky.

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After what felt like a long time, there was a knock at the study door.

"Come in," Damon called.

Nyla opened the door and stepped inside, surprised to find Damon standing by the window. "Damon, don't you have work to do?"

Damon turned to face her. "No, I rescheduled everything for the next few days. I also called Buddy's kindergarten to request some time off for him."

"Mm." Nyla nodded. "There's something I wanted to discuss with you."

"What is it?" Damon asked.

"I just saw one of Buddy's reward requests. He wants to go on a trip with both of us. I was thinking... maybe the three of us could spend the next three days together and take a short trip," Nyla suggested.

A flicker of surprise crossed Damon's face before he nodded. "Alright, I'll find a resort for us."

"Thank you," Nyla replied.

"There's no need for thanks between us," Damon said softly, then paused. "But..... how do you plan to tell Buddy about you leaving?"

The question made Nyla falter, her gaze dropping to the floor. She had never been separated from Mason before, and the thought of explaining it to him filled her with dread.

Damon pulled her into his arms, his voice gentle. "If you don't know how to say it yet, wait until you're ready."

She nodded, leaning into his embrace. "Okay."

Resting against his chest, she began listing all the little things Damon needed to take care of for Mason.

"Buddy is afraid of thunderstorms. If it rains at night, you must stay with him until he falls asleep. He hates carrots, but you need to ensure he eats them at least once a week to prevent vision problems..."

She rambled on, listing every little detail, and Damon quietly listened to it all.

By the time Nyla was done, her voice had grown choked with emotion, and her eyes were red.

If she could, she would never leave Damon and Mason.

Damon gently patted her back. "Nyla, don't worry. I'll take good care of Buddy and will work hard to strengthen Prospectus Technology. I promise it won't be long before I can bring you back."

She nodded, her voice trembling. "I trust you. I just... got so focused on Buddy that I forgot to remind you to take care of yourself, too."

"You need to eat on time every day. If your stomach starts acting up again and I'm not around, I know you won't take it seriously."

"I'll have Spencer check on you regularly. When I return, I'll personally ask him if you've been eating and sleeping well."

Damon couldn't help but laugh.

"Alright, I promise I'll take care of myself. Besides, if I let my health fail and

you decide I'm not worth keeping, what will I do then?"

"At least you'd know," she replied with a small smile.

After wiping her reddened eyes, she stepped out of his arms. "I won't disturb you anymore. Don't stay up too late working."

Just as she turned to leave, Damon

pulled her back into his embraces. "You're leaving for Meristate in three

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us on work?"

Do you think I'll have the heart

"Then let's just chat for a while," Nyla suggested.

"Okay. But before you leave, shouldn't you visit Dad?" Damon asked.

Nyla blinked in surprise at his words and looked up at him. "You're calling him that already?"

"I adapt quickly," Damon replied.

Nyla thought for a moment and said, "I'll go see him tomorrow morning. Just me— you and Buddy can stay home."

"Alright," Damon said.

They spent a little more time in the study before Nyla broke the silence. "I'm going to shower now. I need to get up early tomorrow."

"Okay. I'll join you," Damon said.

Her face flushed red, and she waved her hands dismissively. "That's not necessary. I... uh, want to shower alone..."

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Understanding Nyla's concerns, Damon reassured her, "Don't worry. I won't do anything."

They had only three days left together. He wished time would slow down so he could savor every moment with her. He had no intention of wasting even a second.

Nyla shot him a skeptical look. "Really?"

"Really. I swear," he replied with a serious expression.

Reluctantly, she nodded. "Alright, but you have to keep your word."

"Of course," Damon promised.

Once upstairs, he handed her a towel. "You go ahead and shower first."

"Okay," Nyla replied.

As the sound of running water filled the room, Damon walked to the window, pulled out his phone, and made a call.

"Prepare for departure to Meristate tomorrow. The mission is to protect someone indefinitely," he instructed.

The voice on the other end said something, and Damon replied, "It's my wife, Nyla Kinsey."

After ending the call, Damon slipped his phone into his pocket and gazed at the night sky, his expression hardening. He vowed their separation would not last long.

Half an hour later, Nyla stepped out of the bathroom, her face slightly flushed from the warm steam.

Seeing her wet hair dripping onto her towel, Damon frowned. He grabbed another towel and approached her, gently wrapping it around her head. "Why didn't you dry your hair before coming out?"

"The steam made it feel stuffy, so I wanted some fresh air," she explained.

Damon carefully dried her hair until it no longer dripped. "Get under the covers. I'll grab the hair dryer."

"Okay," Nyla answered.

Damon returned shortly with the hair dryer. Plugging it in, he glanced at her. "Turn around so I can dry your hair."

"I can do it myself—" Nyla began.

"There's no need. Let me," he interrupted firmly.

His tone left no room for argument. Nyla could only turn her back to him.

When he finished, Damon put the hair dryer away and headed to the bathroom to shower.

By the time he returned, Nyla was dressed in her pajamas, sitting on the bed with a book. Hearing his footsteps, she looked up. "Albdone?"

"Yeah," he replied, climbing into bed beside her.

She closed her book and placed it on the nightstand.

Before she could say a word, Damon pulled her into his arms. His embrace was gentle, as though he were holding something fragile and irreplaceable.

Nyla wrapped her arms around him in return. For a moment, the room was silent,

save for the sound of their soft breathing.

"Damon,

in Merion't worry about me. Even I'll find ways to stay? reassuringly. Content behet.

touch with you and Buddy," she said

Damon tightened his hold on her but said nothing for a long time. When he finally spoke, his voice was barely audible. "Mm."

He knew Nyla was trying to comfort him, but he also knew Emerald wouldn't allow her to contact them so easily.

All he could do was strengthen Prospectus Technology-until it was powerful enough to stand against the Nixons.

"Come on, it's not like a life-and-death separation. Don't look so grim," she teased.

"Don't say something so unlucky," Damon replied, his deep voice trembling slightly.