

Trading My Ex for His Uncle c 1311

Damon chuckled, his voice low. "If Nyla takes the money, she'll keep thinking about Ms. Kinsey from time to time. Not taking it means she's truly ready to forget her."

Seeing he couldn't convince either of them, Alexander sighed. "Alright, I'll hold onto the money for now. If you ever need it, just let me know."

Damon nodded. "Okay."

Later that night, Alexander thought it over and decided to deposit the money in a bank under Mason's name, setting it up as a fixed-term deposit for 13 years. It would be given to Mason when he turned 18.

Damon walked to Nyla's bedroom door and knocked softly.

"Come in," Nyla called.

As he pushed the door open, he saw her sitting on the balcony, staring at the distant city lights, lost in thought.

When she noticed him, she smiled. "You're here."

Damon nodded and sat beside her. "Nyla, are you feeling down?"

"No, I just feel a little drained after everything that's happened. I really want to go back home," she replied.

He gently took her hand. "Just a few more days, and we'll be home. Once we're there, we can leave all this behind and focus on being happy-just the three of us."

Nyla glanced at him and teased, "That might not be the case."

Damon frowned slightly. "Why not?"

"Because soon, we'll be a family of four," she said, her eyes twinkling.

"What?!" Damon blurted out.

His eyes widened in shock, as if he couldn't believe what he'd just heard. "Nyla, are you joking? It's not April Fool's Day..."

She pulled out her phone and

showed him a picture of a positive pregnancy test. "I'm serious. I did the math it must've happened right before I left the country, that time I visited your office."

A wave of overwhelming joy hit Damon.

Without thinking, he jumped up, scooped her into his arms, and exclaimed, "Nyla... I-I'm so happy! I thought we'd only ever have Buddy, but now... Thank you!"

Nyla, feeling his excitement, hugged him back "Damon, I should be the one thanking you. You came into my life and saved me time and time again. The luckiest thing that's ever happened to me is meeting you."

"Me too," Damon whispered, holding her tightly and silently promising to cherish her forever.

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Over the next few days, Alexander was busy helping Emerald secure her position. Despite his hectic schedule, he didn't forget to arrange Nyla's flight home.

On the evening before their departure, he cleared his schedule and returned to the villa for dinner with them.

During the meal, Damon raised his glass. "Mr. Kinsey, we couldn't have gone back home without your help. Thank you."

Nyla lifted her juice and echoed, "Yes, thank you."

Alexander raised an eyebrow. "Nyla, we might never see each other again in this lifetime after tonight. Shouldn't you have at least one drink with me?"

Before Nyla could respond, Damon interjected, "She's pregnant. No alcohol." Alexander froze for a moment, then his eyes lit up with excitement. "Really?!" Another niece or nephew on the way!

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Nyla nodded. "I only just found out a few days ago."

Alexander grinned. "That's amazing-double the good news!"

He turned to Damon. "You'd better take good care of her when you're back. Otherwise, you'll have me to answer to."

He was definitely going to visit them when the baby was born.

"I will. I promise," Damon replied.

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The next morning, they boarded the plane home.

After a long flight, they finally landed safely in Saintornia.

As soon as they got off the plane, the first thing Nyla wanted to do was see Mason.

When they arrived at the villa, simply standing at the front door made her eyes well up with tears.

Damon steadied her and spoke gently. "Nyla, you're pregnant now. You shouldn't get too emotional."

She wiped her tears. "I know... I just missed Buddy so much."

"Let's go inside first," Damon said.

The moment they stepped into the living room, they saw Mason sitting on the couch, watching TV with a blank expression.

Nyla stared at him, afraid it was all just a dream. A dream where she'd wake up back at Emerald's estate, trapped again with no way out.

Finally, she carefully called his name, "Mason..."

Mason's head snapped around. Seeing her and Damon, he froze for a moment before scrambling off the couch and running toward them. "Daddy! Mommy!"

Nyla crouched down and caught him in her arms, holding him tightly. It wasn't until she felt his small, warm body that she truly believed she was home.

She choked up. "Buddy, I'm so sorry. You must've been so scared while I was gone."

Mason sniffled and wiped his eyes "I wasn't scared. Daddy told me you left because of me, so I had to grow up fast. That way, I can protect you next time instead of you protecting me."

Nyla's heart shattered.

She felt a deep ache for her son, but at the same time, she couldn't help but glare at Damon for putting such thoughts in his head.

Damon rubbed his nose sheepishly. "It's good for kids to develop resilience early." "You and I are going to have a talk later," she said firmly.

After finally settling Mason down, Nyla marched into Damon's study, ready to hold him accountable.

Seeing her stern expression, Damon immediately put down his

documents and got up to pacify her. "Nyla, don't be mad. I know I messed up. I promise I won't ever tell him things like that again. Can you forgive me this time?"

She pushed his hands away, clearly still upset. "Stay away from me! Your usual tricks won't work this time!"

"Then what will work?" Damon asked.

"Stop joking around. Before I left, I specifically told you not to talk to Buddy about this. But you did it anyway. Do you realize how much unnecessary worry and fear you put in his little heart?" Nyla demanded.

Under her sharp gaze, Damon looked like a guilty child caught misbehaving. He didn't even dare to meet her eyes.

"Nyla, I'm sorry. I wanted to go to Meristate to find you, but I was afraid Buddy would feel abandoned if we both left. So I told him the truth.

"I swear, I'll never do it again. Please don't be mad... Seeing you upset makes me panic," he pleaded.

Watching him try so hard to make amends, Nyla felt the last bit of her anger melt away.

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"Alright, I'll let it slide this time. But from now on, we need to spend more time with Buddy. We can't let this leave a lasting emotional scar on him," Nyla said.

"Got it! Mission accepted!" Damon quickly replied.

Nyla couldn't help but chuckle. "Alright, I still need to take my dad home later. You should get back to work."

"Why don't you let Dad stay here tonight?" Damon asked.

Nyla sighed. "I tried, but he refused. He said he's used to living there and prefers to go back."

Damon nodded. "Alright, but you're pregnant now. I'll take him home later."

"Then let's go together. You drive," Nyla said.

"Okay," Damon agreed.

Nyla left Damon's study and walked to the living room, where Harrison was sitting on the couch, playing with Mason.

She sat down beside them. "Dad, Damon and I will take you home later."

"No need. Just call me a car. I've already arranged for the housekeeper to meet me downstairs," Harrison refused.

"How can I be at ease with that? We'd rather take you ourselves."

"By the way, have you felt unwell at all while you were in Meristate? If you have, I'll take you to the hospital for a check-up tomorrow," Nyla asked.

Harrison shook his head. "No. Even though Emerald forced me to stay there, she made sure I had the best medical care. Honestly, my health has improved a lot."

Hearing that, Nyla chuckled. "Then maybe I should've let you stay in that nursing home a little longer. You might've gotten even better."

"No, thanks. When I was stuck in that place, just thinking about Emerald using me to threaten you made me feel like I was better off dead. If I hadn't been tied to the hospital bed every day, I might've jumped out the window already," Harrison grunted.

"Dad!" Nyla frowned, clearly upset. "Don't say things like that! You're going to live a long, healthy life!"

go

Harrison looked at her with a calm expression Nyla, at my age, and with my health, I've already made peace with the fact that I could. any time. If my condition suddenly worsens one day, don't be too sad, okay? Life, death, the changing of seasons-it's all part of the cycle."

No one could be with someone forever.

"Dad, stop saying things like that. I can't accept it," Nyla said firmly.

Seeing her eyes turn red, Harrison reached out and gently patted her head with a smile. "Alright, alright. You're a mother now, and you still cry this easily? Don't be sad. I'm still here, aren't I?"

He just wanted to say a proper goodbye while he still could.

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With his when

hoteling

he might quietly slip away.

Nyla pouted. "Okay, but you have to promise me you won't talk like that again."

Harrison promised, "Alright, I won't."

As they spoke, Damon walked out of his study.

Seeing Nyla's red eyes, he crouched down beside her. "What's wrong? Why are your eyes so red?"

"It's nothing. Let's take Dad home," she said.

When they arrived downstairs at Harrison's building, the housekeeper was already waiting.

After settling him in, they stayed for a little while before heading back home.

When they got back, Nyla saw Mason barely able to keep his eyes open, still fighting sleep in the living room.

Her heart ached.

Mason must've been scared that she and Damon would suddenly disappear again. That must be why he had stayed up, waiting for them.

As soon as Mason saw her, he jumped off the couch and ran to her. "Mommy, you're finally home! Can I sleep with you tonight?"

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Nyla knelt in front of Mason and gently said, "Of course."

"Thank you, Mommy!" Mason chirped.

For the next week, Mason slept with Nyla and Damon every night. Only after he was completely sure they weren't going anywhere did he finally move back to his own room.

As soon as Valarie found out that Nyla and Damon were back, she drove straight to their house.

The moment she saw Nyla, her eyes turned red, and she rushed over to hug her tightly. "I thought you were never coming back! You didn't even tell me you just disappeared! Do you even consider me a friend?!"

Nyla gently patted her back. "I didn't want you to worry."

"And that's why you just left without a word?! You're a terrible person!" Valarie whined.

"Okay, okay, I admit it. I'm awful. I'm sorry, alright? Please don't be mad," Nyla coaxed.

Valarie scolded her a little more before finally sitting down on the couch. "So now that you're back, you're not going back to Meristate, right?"

Nyla shook her head. "Nope. I have nothing to do with that place anymore."

"Good. After you left, I did some digging on the Nixons. Their internal conflicts are insane." Valarie sighed. "With your personality, if you'd stayed there any longer, you might've been taken out without even knowing who was behind it."

Nyla said, "Let's not talk about that anymore. What about you? How are things with Brandon?"

Valarie scoffed. "Don't even mention him. We broke up. I just met a new guy recently. Let me show you a picture."

She pulled out her phone and showed Nyla a photo of her and a younger man.

Nyla glanced at it and, for some reason, felt like he looked oddly familiar. "Valarie... I don't know if I'm imagining things, but this guy looks kind of familiar. I don't think I've met him before, though."

Valarie waved it off. "You're probably mistaken. I just met him not long ago."

"Maybe. It just feels like I've seen him somewhere before. Never mind, I can't remember right now. If it comes to me, I'll let you know."

"But tell me, what happened with Brandon? Why'd you break up?" Nyla asked.

Valarie's smile instantly turned cold. "He kept meeting up with this female 'friend.' Sure, there were always a couple of guys with them too, but couldn't stand how fake she was. He refused to cut ties with her, so I

ended it."

Just thinking about all the times she caught Brandon and Michelle together made her furious all over again.

But now that she'd dumped him, she wasn't about to dwell on it.

There were plenty of men in the world. Lose one, and another would show up soon enough.

Nyla frowned. "Brandon never struck me as someone who doesn't know how to set boundaries."

Valarie rolled her eyes. "Who cares? He's history now. He's got nothing to do with me anymore."

"Fair enough. I support you," Nyla said.

"Anyway, let's stop talking about him. I'm more interested in this younger guy I met. I really want to go after him. You have to teach me how to win him over!" Valarie gushed.

Nyla hesitated. "Uh... I'm not exactly an expert at that."

"Oh, come on! You must know something! Look at how head over heels Damon is for you! We're best friends-don't hold back! Give me all your secrets. I have a dinner date with him tonight!" Valarie urged.

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"I really don't know. I can barely remember how we even started liking each other.

By the time I realized it, we already had feelings," Nyla explained.

Seeing how serious Nyla looked, Valarie let out a sigh. "Fine. I guess I'll have to figure it out on my own."

The two continued chatting for a while. Just as Valarie was about to leave, Damon walked in.

She stood up to greet him but frowned slightly when she saw Brandon following behind him. Without a word, she completely ignored him.

Brandon's face darkened for a moment, and he was about to say something when Valarie turned to Nyla and said, "Nyla, I'm heading out."

"Okay, I'll walk you out," Nyla offered.

"No need. I've been here so many times-I know the way," Valarie dismissed.

Watching Valarie disappear out the door, Brandon hesitated for a moment before turning to Damon. "Uncle Damon, I need to talk to Valarie. Give me ten minutes."

Without waiting for a response, he rushed out after her.

When he reached the entrance, he saw Valarie about to get into her car and quickly stepped forward to block her. "We need to talk."

Valarie's expression was blank. "Mr. Sumner, we've broken up. There's nothing left to talk about. Now, please move."

Brandon looked helpless. "Valarie, I've already cut ties with Michelle. You won't see me with her ever again. Just give me one more chance, okay?"

Valarie almost laughed. "Brandon, do you really think I'd believe you?"

He had promised her the same thing countless times-swearing he wouldn't see Michelle again. And yet?

Time and time again, she had only been met with disappointment.

Now, she was done putting herself through the pain. She didn't want to hear another lie.

"This time, I swear-it's really the last time," Brandon promised.

Valarie took a deep breath, locking eyes with him. "Alright. If you're so sure, let's make a bet. If you can go one month without seeing Michelle, I'll take you back. But if you can't, then you need to leave me alone for good."

"Deal!" Brandon agreed instantly.

To him, it was an easy condition to meet.

"Can you move now?" Valarie asked.

Brandon didn't budge. He stared at her intently. "Valarie, if I do this, you'll really take me back, right?"

"I will. But you should focus on proving yourself first," Valarie replied.

Brandon nodded firmly. "You'll see I won't let you down."

Valarie simply smiled and said nothing more.

Ten minutes later, Brandon returned to the house.

As soon as he stepped into the living room, he noticed both Damon and Nyla staring at him.

He paused, instinctively reaching up

to trace. "Uncle Damon,

Aunt Nyla... why are you both staring at me? Do I have something on my face?"

Damon raised an eyebrow. "No. Let's go to the study."

Without another word, he got up and walked toward the study.

Brandon hurried after him, and the two disappeared behind the door.

They talked business until evening.. When they finally emerged, they

found

Nyla sitting on

watching TV. Content

belongs to

Damon walked over and said gently, "Nyla, you need to rest more. Don't watch too much TV."

Nyla looked up at him. "I'm not tired. Go wash some fruit for me. I'm craving strawberries."

Damon chuckled. "Alright. I'll also let Lydia know to make a couple more dishes. Brandon is staying for dinner."

Nyla glanced at Brandon, her expression unreadable. "Oh."

As Valarie's friend, her opinion of Brandon had plummeted when she learned about his situation with that other woman. If he weren't Damon's nephew, she wouldn't have even bothered to be polite.

Sensing something was wrong, the server quickly followed. "Sir! Please, we really do require a reservation- Sir!"

The commotion drew attention from the other diners, including Valarie and her dinner date.

Just as she looked up, her gaze collided

With Brandon's sharp, frigid

Her fingers subconsciously

tightened around her fork.

from her.

Brandon reached her side in an instant, casting a glance at the man sitting across

He wasn't bad-looking-no wonder Valarie was interested.

But when the guy met Brandon's gaze, he immediately looked away, his expression nervous and evasive.

A sneer flickered in Brandon's eyes.

Chapter 1316

Brandon noticed Nyla's cold attitude and sat down in silence. Neither of them spoke until Damon returned with the fruit.

"Why so quiet?" he asked.

Nyla took the bowl of strawberries from his hands. "Nothing to talk about."

Damon looked slightly surprised. Nyla rarely made her feelings about someone so obvious.

He turned to Brandon and asked, "Did you do something to upset my wife?"

Brandon was speechless.

He was innocent! He hadn't even seen Nyla recently-how could he have offended her?

Then it hit him. Valarie must have told her everything during her visit earlier. That had to be why Nyla was siding with her friend and giving him the cold shoulder.

Realizing this, he grew anxious. "Aunt Nyla, I swear, there was nothing going on between me and that friend. Valarie misunderstood."

"Oh," Nyla said flatly. "Then go explain it to her. She's the one dating you, after all."

Thinking about Valarie's dinner plans that evening, Nyla suddenly chuckled. If Brandon knew about the younger man Valarie was meeting tonight, his reaction would be priceless.

"I already cut ties with that friend. Valarie said that if I don't see her for a month, she'll forgive me," Brandon explained.

Nyla took a bite of her strawberry and nodded. "Good luck with that."

"Mm," Brandon hummed in response.

Soon, dinner was ready.

Just as they sat down, Brandon's phone rang. The moment he answered, his expression darkened. "Got it. I'll be right there."

Hanging up, he stood abruptly. "Uncle Damon, Aunt Nyla, something urgent came up. I have to go. Let's have dinner another time."

As they watched him rush out, Damon looked slightly surprised. Brandon had always been steady and composed-it was rare to see him so flustered.

Nyla placed a chicken wing on Damon's plate. "Eat up, or the food will get cold." Damon smiled. "Alright."

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Brandon sped toward a high-end restaurant.

The drive usually took 40 minutes, yet he made it in under 30.

As soon as he stepped out of his car, he spotted Valarie sitting by a window-with another man.

Through the glass, he could clearly see her soft, shy smile and the subtle way she teased the guy across from her.

Brandon clenched his fists, his blood nearly boiling.

How could she promise to take him

back if

Miche

stayed away from

, only to turn around al

have dinner with another man?!

His face darkened as rage and Stration surged through him.

a second thought, he

stormed into the restaurant

A server at the entrance hurried over. "Sir, we require reservations to dine here.

Are you looking for someone, or—"

"Move." Brandon's voice was ice-cold, his eyes burning with fury.

Startled by his intimidating presence, the server instinctively stepped back.

Brandon ignored her and strode straight inside.

Sensing something was wrong, the server quickly followed. "Sir! Please, we really do require a reservation- Sir!"

The commotion drew attention from the other diners, including Valarie and her dinner date.

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Valarie frowned and coldly asked, "Brandon, what are you doing here?"

Brandon glared at her, frustration thick in his voice. "Valarie, I should be the one asking you that. You promised me that if I stayed away from Michelle for a month, you'd forgive me. So why are you here, on a date with another man?"

His tone dripped with jealousy, but Valarie remained unfazed.

"I did say that," she replied calmly. "But if I remember correctly, we're already broken up. Who I see and what I do is none of your business, is it?"

Brandon's face darkened. "You say we're broken up, but I never agreed to that. We just had a fight. And if you're seeing someone else while we're in a rough patch, that's not fair to us, is it?"

Before Valarie could respond, the man across from her spoke up. "It's fine, mister. Even if I'm just a backup for her, I'm willing."

The words hung in the air, and the entire restaurant fell silent.

Brandon's anger flared, and he let out a laugh, though it was devoid of humor. He turned to the young man, his gaze ice-cold. "Even as a backup, you're not qualified."

The young man didn't flinch. He simply smiled. "Mister, I don't think that's for you to decide. As long as Veevee agrees, that's all that matters."

Brandon's expression darkened further, a surge of frustration washing over him. It was like trying to punch a pillow-no resistance, no impact, just pure helplessness.

The young man turned to Valarie, his eyes filled with sincerity. "Veevee, would you be willing to let me be your backup? Whether it's a month, a year, or longer, I'll wait. As long as you're not married, I won't give up."

Valarie hesitated. Her friends had been right-youth had an undeniable charm. When someone this young, full of energy, looked at her with that kind of devotion, it was hard to resist.

She pressed her lips together, ready to respond, when a firm grip suddenly closed around her wrist.

Before she could react, Brandon yanked her from her seat and began dragging her toward the door.

She barely took two steps when another hand grabbed her other wrist.

"Mister, it looks like Veevee doesn't want to leave with you. You should let her go," the young man said, his voice calm but firm.

Brandon turned sharply, feeling the resistance. His gaze hardened when he saw the young man's hand on Valarie's wrist. "If you want to keep that hand, I suggest you let go right now."

His words cut through the air like ice.

The young man didn't flinch. He simply smiled. "I won't let go unless you do first."

Brandon inhaled deeply, trying to suppress the fury boiling inside him. He locked eyes with the young man, speaking slowly. "Judging by your age and the way you dress, your family isn't well-off, is it? Don't make a reckless decision that could bring trouble to them-"

"Brandon!" Valarie had reached her limit. She yanked her hand free from his grip and snapped, "I'm warning you if you do anything to him, I will never forgive you!" fo

Brandon's eyes turned red, his expression a mixture of disbelief and disappointment. "Valarie, you'd say something like that to me... for this guy?"

Valarie's heart tightened at the sight of his pained look. She quickly looked away, unable to meet his gaze.

Although they were broken up, how could she stop caring about him so easily? After all, she had once truly loved him-enough to imagine a lifetime together.

Chapter 1318



"Just go, Brandon. I don't want to argue with you here," Valarie said.

Upon seeing her cold expression, a sharp pain stabbed at Brandon's chest. Without a word, he turned and walked away.

Only when his figure disappeared through the restaurant's doors did the young man finally release Valarie's hand.

"Are you okay, Veevee?" he asked softly.

Valarie exhaled, offering a small smile. "I'm fine. Let's finish eating."

But throughout the rest of the meal, she was clearly distracted.

The young man noticed and did his best to make her laugh, but her mood remained subdued.

After dinner, Valarie offered to drive him back to his university.

The drive was quiet, her energy subdued-nothing like the lively spirit she'd had when they first met up.

When they reached the campus gate, he turned to her. "Veevee, do you... still have feelings for that guy from earlier?"

Valarie hesitated before answering, "No, I'm just tired. Don't overthink it. Get some rest."

"When can I see you again? I'll treat you to dinner next time," the young man said. "We'll see. Work's been busy lately," Valarie dismissed.

"Oh... okay." His disappointment was clear, his eyes drooping like a puppy left behind.

Valarie sighed, her heart softening slightly. "I have a big project coming up, so I'll be working late all week. Once it's done, I'll reach out."

His face lit up immediately. "Okay! I'll wait for your message."

"Alright," Valarie replied.

After he left, she drove home.

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As soon as Valarie pulled into her driveway, she saw a familiar car parked outside

and sighed. Brandon was waiting for her.

Ignoring him, she got out of the car and walked straight toward her door.

"Valarie!" Brandon hurried after her, blocking her path.

"Move," she said, her voice sharp.

He looked down at her, hurt in his eyes. "Are you mad at me? Is it because of that guy?"

"Brandon, I'm exhausted. I don't want to deal with you right now. I don't want to see you. So, please leave," Valarie said.

"I won't! You're abandoning me for someone else. I won't allow it!" Brandon cried out.

The memory of that young man calling himself a 'backup' gnawed at Brandon, fueling his frustration.

Valarie met his gaze with steady

eyes. "Brandon, you were the one

who abandoned me first. And just so you're clear—we're broken up. You don't get to control who I see."

"But... you promised that if I stayed away from Michelle for a month, you'd forgive me," Brandon reminded her.

"Then come find me when you've actually done it," Valarie said.

With that, she moved to step past him, reaching for the door.

Before she could open it, an arm wrapped around her waist.

In one swift motion, Brandon pulled her into his embrace. As he felt her in his arms, the panic in his chest finally began to ease.

Back at the restaurant, seeing her with another man had filled him with an overwhelming fear—the kind that came with truly believing he was about to lose

her.

"Let go of me!" Valarie struggled, pushing against his chest. Her eyes burned with resistance.

Brandon tightened his hold, lowering his voice. "Valarie, I won't interfere with whoever you see this month.

But when it's over, I expect you to keep your word and take me back."

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Valarie froze for a moment, then let out a cold laugh. "Wow. How generous of you."

Brandon fell silent.

After a long pause, he murmured, "I'm not being generous. Today, when I saw you with him... I finally understood how you felt every time you saw me with Michelle. Consider this month my punishment."

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Valarie pushed him away, her expression impassive. "Say that again when the month is over."

"You can trust me. I'll keep my promise," Brandon assured her.

A flicker of sarcasm crossed Valarie's face, but she remained silent.

She walked into the villa, and only once the door clicked shut behind her did Brandon turn and leave.

Back in her bedroom, Valarie collapsed onto the couch, pressing her fingers to her throbbing temples.

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The following days passed in a blur of work.

Valarie was so consumed that she barely had time to eat.

Every now and then, her youthful admirer would text her, asking what she was up to. If she had a free moment, she'd send a brief reply. Otherwise, she ignored him.

Thankfully, he was tactful enough not to press when she didn't respond.

By Friday evening, the preliminary phase of the project was complete, and Valarie finally had the chance to enjoy a proper weekend.

She called Nyla, hoping to meet for drinks.

There was a brief pause before Nyla's voice came through. "Valarie, I can't drink right now. I'm pregnant."

"Why can't you drink when you're pregnant? Wait, hold on, what?! You're pregnant?! Since when?" Valarie asked.

"I just found out recently. I was going to tell you the last time we met, but I completely forgot," Nyla explained.

After the initial shock wore off, Valarie grinned. "Congrats! I'm officially claiming godmother rights."

"Of course," Nyla replied.

"But seriously—this is your second kid, and I don't even have a fiancé yet. The universe is really messing with me," Valarie whined.

Nyla chuckled. "Your time will come. Weren't you just having dinner with your young man the other day? How's that going?"

Valarie scoffed. "Don't even bring it up. Brandon showed up and ruined

everything. Just thinking about it pisses me off."

"Is there really no chance for you and Brandon?" Nyla asked.

Valarie lowered her gaze.

After a long pause, she murmured, "don't know... I'm confused. I told him if he stayed away from Michelle for a month, I'd forgive him. I guess we'll see in a month."

She had been with Brandon for so long that it was impossible to move on overnight. She still had feelings for him, but every time she faced him, she couldn't help but wonder how much of what he said was real-and how much was a lie. Content belongs to

If she had to live her whole life second-guessing him, she'd go insane.

"Take your time," Nyla said gently.

"Love should make you happy. If et

you're good together, stay together. If not, let it go. Marriage isn't the goal. Happiness is."

That was exactly why she had married Damon. She knew she'd never love anyone else but him.

Valarie hummed. "Yeah, I know. Anyway, I'll let you go. I need to grab some dinner."

After hanging up, she opened a chat with a contact named Stefan Foley. The conversation was mostly filled with his messages.

Stefan: [Veevee, are you still busy? It started snowing in the middle of class today, and for some reason, I thought of you.]

Below was a photo of the snowy view outside a university classroom window.

The message was from yesterday. At the time, Valarie had been scrambling to finish a report. She glanced at it but didn't reply.

This morning, he had sent a simple good morning sticker with a sleepy emoji.

Stefan: [Winter mornings are the worst. I just wanna stay glued to my blanket forever.]

Valarie chuckled. Just as she was about to reply, a new message popped up.

Stefan: [Veevee, are you still working? I'm free tomorrow. If you're busy, I can bring you lunch. What do you think?]

Chapter 1320



Valarie raised an eyebrow and called Stefan.

The call was answered almost immediately, followed by a nervous voice. "V-Veevee? You're calling me?"

"Did I interrupt anything?" Valarie asked.

"N-No! Not at all! I'm just surprised, that's all," Stefan replied.

Valarie smiled. "Have you eaten yet?"

"I... uh... n-not yet... There's a new menu in the cafeteria. It's really good. Want to come try it?" Stefan asked.

His cautious, hopeful tone tugged at Valarie's heart.

"Sure. Give me 20 minutes," Valarie said.

After hanging up, she drove straight to Saintosh University.

...

The moment Valarie parked near the entrance, she saw Stefan walking toward her.

She stepped out of the car and met him halfway. "Have you been waiting for me this whole time?"

Stefan shook his head. "No, I just got here."

As he spoke, he avoided her gaze, his eyes darting nervously.

They walked across campus together, Stefan eagerly pointing out buildings and landmarks.

Valarie laughed. "You know, I actually attended here too."

Stefan froze. "Wait. Seriously?"

"Yeap. So technically, I'm your senior," Valarie said.

"Nice to meet you, senior!" Stefan greeted with a smile.

They exchanged grins. As they passed familiar campus landmarks, Valarie mused, "Things have changed a lot since I was a student here."

"I can give you a tour after we eat," Stefan offered.

Valarie chuckled. "Sure. I'll leave it to you then, junior."

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Brandon was reviewing documents when his secretary, Charlie, knocked and entered.

"Mr. Sumner, Ms. Weir went to Saintosh University after work," Charlie reported.

Brandon's grip on the papers tightened. His voice turned cold. "She's seeing that guy again, isn't she?"

"I'm not sure. Would you like me to look into it?" Charlie asked.

"No need. You can go," Brandon dismissed.

Once the door closed, he set the file down and picked up his phone.

After a moment's hesitation, he sent Valarie a message.

Brandon: [Valarie, are you free tomorrow? I reserved a table at that steakhouse

you wanted to try. Let's have lunch together?]

The message was sent, but there was no response.

Half an hour passed. Still nothing.

A sense of unease gnawed at him. He grabbed his coat, ready to leave, when his phone rang.

It was Jayden.

"Brandon, Michelle got hurt because

of you! She's still in the hospital. Never mind that you didn't visit you haven't even called to check on her. Don't you think that's a little heartless?!" Jayden demanded.

"I have things to do," Brandon replied flatly.

if she appreciate what she did a

s anything, I'll help But

I'm not going to see her."

Jayden's voice turned furious. "What the hell?! She got hurt for you! We've been friends for years, and your willing to throw that all away for Valarie?!"

Brandon stopped in his tracks, his voice firm. "Between Valarie and Michelle, I choose Valarie."