

Trading My Ex for His Uncle

C 1321

"Fine, Brandon. Don't regret this!" Jayden snapped and hung up the phone.

Brandon set his phone down and walked out of his office.

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When Jayden returned to the hospital ward, Michelle looked at him with anticipation. "Jayden, what did Brandon say? Did he agree to come?"

Meeting Michelle's hopeful gaze, Jayden pressed his lips together and lowered his eyes, unable to meet hers. "Michelle... Brandon's been really busy with work lately, so he doesn't have time to visit. But once he's less busy, he'll come see you

"You don't have to lie to me," Michelle cut him off, her gaze falling as she gave a self-deprecating smile. "He's not busy... He just doesn't want to come, does he?" "Michelle..." Jayden walked over to the bedside, wanting to comfort her, but he didn't know what to say.

"Jayden, can I have some time alone?" Michelle asked quietly.

Seeing the heartbreak on her face, Jayden felt a sharp pang of sadness. He also felt a growing sense of unfairness toward her.

She had been injured saving Brandon, yet ever since she'd been hospitalized, all he had done was send an assistant to pay the bills and deliver some supplements. He hadn't visited her once.

Even as a casual friend, he wouldn't be so cold, let alone after all the years they'd spent together.

The more Jayden thought about it, the angrier he became.

Taking a deep breath, he looked at Michelle and said firmly, "Don't worry, Michelle. I'll make sure Brandon comes to see you!"

With that, he turned and walked out of the room. He made a call. "Do something for me!"

Once Jayden left, Michelle picked up her phone and opened her chat with Brandon.

Their conversation had stopped over a week ago when she had asked him to visit, but he never responded.

Scrolling up, she saw the pattern-she would send several messages, and he would reply with one, often dismissively.

She had fallen for him at first sight and had stayed by his side as a friend for years. She always knew. that, to him, she was just a friend. That's why she never

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confessed-because once she did, they wouldn't even be able to stay friends.

Michelle had thought staying in Brandon's life as a friend would be enough. But then, he fell for someone else.

When she found out he liked Valarie and had chased after her for so long without success, she had hoped, maybe, just maybe, she still had a chance.

She never expected Valarie to actually agree to be with him. The jealousy had nearly driven her mad. At her worst, she wished Valarie would disappear from the world entirely.

Then no one would stand in her way.

Michelle gripped her phone so tightly

her knuckles turned white, her

expression dark and twisted. She

never let Valarie stay by ndon's side!

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After walking around the campus, Valarie and Stefan parted ways at the school gate.

As she turned to leave, Stefan suddenly called out, "Veevee, wait a second..."

Valarie turned back, raising an eyebrow at his cautious expression.

Amused, she asked, "What is it?"

Stefan looked nervous, his hands clenched at his sides. Taking a deep breath, he finally blurted out, "Can I... hug you?"

His voice was barely above a whisper, and he couldn't even meet her eyes. His ears were bright red, almost like they were burning.

Valarie was momentarily stunned, then chuckled. She took a step closer.

As she approached, Stefan caught the scent of gardenias from her perfume.

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Then, Stefan was enveloped by the fragrance.

When Valarie's arms wrapped around his waist, his body stiffened as though he had been struck by an electric jolt.

Before he could respond, she had already released him.

Smiling, she said, "Thanks for dinner and for showing me around campus tonight. Goodnight."

"G-Goodnight..." Stefan stammered.

As Valarie walked away, the faint scent of gardenias lingered for a moment before fading, leaving Stefan with an inexplicable sense of loss.

He stood there, watching her car until it disappeared from view. Only then did he snap back to reality and head toward his dorm.

Just as he reached the building, his phone rang. Seeing the name "Michelle" on the screen, he hesitated before stepping aside to answer.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Nothing much. Just wondering how things are going with Valarie," Michelle replied.

"It's whatever. If that's all, I'm hanging up," Stefan said.

A cold laugh echoed from the other end of the line. "Stefan, if you still want me to cover your mother's medical bills, you'd better do exactly what I say. Otherwise, you might want to start preparing for her funeral."

Stefan's grip on his phone tightened. He stood there, silent for more than ten seconds, forcing down the rage and helplessness threatening to surface. "I got it. I'll do as you say."

"I expect you and Valarie to be together within a month," Michelle demanded.

Without waiting for him to respond, she ended the call.

Stefan's hand slowly dropped to his side.

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he turned toward the dorm and disappeared into the shadows.

When Valarie arrived home, she frowned at the sight of Brandon's car parked outside.

Getting out of her car, she approached him and met his gaze coldly. "Brandon, why are you here again—"

Before she could finish, he suddenly pulled her into his arms.

She froze in shock, then immediately struggled. "Let go of me!"

"Valarie..." Brandon's voice was hoarse, almost pleading. "For this one month, can you not see other men? Can you not let them get close to you? I can't stand it."

Valarie quickly realized what was happening and sneered. "Are you having me followed, Brandon?"

Otherwise, how would he be here at her house, saying this, when she had just been at Saintosh University with Stefan?

"I just wanted to make sure you were

safe. I wasn't spying on you and

Stefan if I had been, I wouldn't be

here waiting. I would've gone

straight to Saintosh University

myself," Brandon defended

As he spoke, he tightened his grip, as though trying to fuse her into himself.

"You're hurting me! Let go!" Valarie cried.

Hearing that, Brandon immediately loosened his hold.

Valarie seized the opportunity to push him away, letting out a cold laugh. "How is this any different from stalking?"

"Brandon, I don't need you controlling who I see or what I do. If you keep following me, our one-month deal is off. I won't give you another chance."

"Valarie, I can't stand seeing you smile at another man. I can't bear the thought of you falling in love with someone else. That would be too cruel for me... Just give me a month, okay? After that, let's give ourselves another chance," Brandon pleaded.

Looking at his bloodshot eyes, Valarie clenched the strap of her purse and turned her head away "You have no right to make demands of me, and I have no

obligation to wait for you."

To her, there was no way Brandon could go an entire month without seeing Michelle.

He had made promises before, yet still met with Michelle behind her back.

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Valarie no longer believed Brandon.

"Valarie..." Brandon reached out to take her hand, but she quickly stepped away.

"As for what happens next, let's talk about it after you actually follow through on our bet," she said.

The next morning, just as Valarie finished washing up, she received a message from Stefan.

Stefan: [Good morning, Veevee! Are you up yet? The weather's nice today. Want to go out and have some fun?]

Valarie: [No, I have things to do today.]

Stefan: [Oh... okay...]

Seeing the sighing emoji he sent, Valarie couldn't help but smile.

She remembered last night when they'd been walking around campus. Stefan's shoes were so worn from washing that the color had faded, and the edges were frayed. Her smile faded a little.

After a moment of thought, she sent him another message, asking if he was free to go shopping with her.

Stefan replied almost immediately, his cheerful tone evident. They agreed to meet at the university gate in an hour.

An hour later, Valarie picked up Stefan, and they drove to the mall.

"Veevee, why the sudden urge to go shopping? Is there something you need to buy?" Stefan asked.

Valarie nodded. "Yeah, a friend of mine is pregnant, so I want to get her and the baby some gifts."

"Oh, I see," Stefan replied.

They chatted casually on the drive.

Thirty minutes later, Valarie parked in the mall's underground parking.

She led him to the clothing department on the second floor right after they got out.

As they entered the shopping center,

Stefan noticed people eyeing him. It wasn't outright disdain, but that subtle, pretentious judgment that people tried to mask, as if revealing it would somehow lower their status. sŵnovel

He used to resent it, but now...

He hesitated and spoke carefully. "Veevee, maybe I should wait for you in the parking lot?"

Valarie turned to look at him. "Why?"

Stefan seemed troubled. "I think walking around with you like this makes you look bad."

Seeing the unease and

embarrassment in his eyes, Valarie frowned slightly before linking her arm through his. "You haven't stolen anything, and you haven't hurt anyone. What's there to be ashamed of?" sŵnovel

Her gaze was warm and sincere.

It was like a feather brushing against Stefan's heart-ticklish, unfamiliar.

"Veevee, if you keep treating me like this, I might actually fall for you," he confessed.

Valarie chuckled. "That's great! I've always been lovable. Now, let's go. I have a lot to buy today."

Stefan let himself be led forward. He glanced at her side profile, feeling his heart skip a beat.

Lowering his gaze, he forced himself

to suppress the chaotic thoughts swirling in his mind. If Valarie ever found out that he was deliberately getting close to her, she would never forgive him.

Some feelings and fantasies weren't meant to be entertained from the start.

Stefan clenched his fists, his expression growing colder.

Valarie led him into a men's clothing store and picked out several casual outfits, handing them to him. "Go try these on."

Stefan shook his head. "Veevee, I don't need them."

"Who said they're for you? A friend of mine has a birthday coming up. You're about the same size, so I need you to try them on for me," Valarie explained.

A flicker of disappointment crossed Stefan's eyes, but he quickly forced a smile. "Got it."

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Stefan took the clothes and walked into the fitting room.

As he changed, he glanced at the price tags. The shirt cost 2,427.99 dollars, and the pants were 1,231.50 dollars. Together, they nearly totaled a year's worth of his part-time wages.

Stefan took a deep breath, shook off his thoughts, and stepped out. "Veevee, how does it look? Does it fit?"

Valarie turned to look at him, momentarily stunned. A satisfied smile spread

across her face as she walked over and smoothed out the wrinkles on his sleeve.

"Mm, looks great. Try on the other sets too. Oh, and these—I just picked them out. Try them as well," she said.

"Alright." Stefan obediently tried on more than a dozen outfits without complaining.

In the end, Valarie bought everything he had tried on, including the shoes.

As they left the store, the sales associate beamed, walking them to the entrance. "Ms. Weir, we look forward to your next visit!"

With so many shopping bags in hand, continuing to browse wasn't practical.

Valarie turned to Stefan. "Let's drop these off in the car first, then we can continue. Also, did you have breakfast this morning?"

Stefan nodded. "Yeah. Did you?"

"Nope. Let's find a place to eat," Valarie suggested.

"Okay," Stefan replied.

Upon seeing how obedient he was, Valarie's smile deepened.

"Oh, by the way, aren't you curious who I bought those clothes for?" she asked.

Stefan shook his head, showing little interest. "If you wanted to tell me, you would. Since you didn't, asking wouldn't change anything."

Valarie raised an eyebrow. Well, wasn't he considerate?

After storing the bags in the car, Valarie checked the time-it was almost 11:00 a.m. She decided to find a nearby restaurant and have an early lunch.

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As they sat down, she smiled. "Order whatever you want. Lunch is on me, as a thank-you for helping me try on clothes earlier."

Stefan hesitated briefly before nodding. "Alright."

After ordering, Valarie grabbed her bag. "I'm going to the restroom."

She had barely left when a man suddenly sat down across from Stefan. Stefan looked up and saw that it was Brandon. "Mr. Sumner, this seat's taken."

Brandon leaned back, his expression cold. "Mr. Foley, Valarie is my girlfriend. You'd better stay away from her, or you won't be able to handle the consequences."

"If I remember correctly, last time we met, Veevee already said she broke up with you. You two don't have any relationship anymore. Whether I'm close to her or not isn't something you get to decide," Stefan retorted.

Brandon's fists clenched, his gaze darkening. "We were just fighting, not breaking up. She said that out of anger. You really took it seriously?"

Stefan smiled I'll ask her myself whether she meant it. I don't just take someone else's word for it. Also, she should be back from the restroom soon. If you're still here when she returns, she might get upset."

Brandon snorted. "Don't think that acting all

fall fornocent will make Valarie

fall for you. She's only hanging

around you to spite me. You should really figure out where you stand."

"Thanks for the advice, Mr. Sumner," Stefan replied.

Not long after Brandon left, Valarie returned.

She immediately noticed something was off about Stefan and was about to ask when her phone buzzed inside her bag.

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Valarie pulled out her phone and saw a message from a friend.

[Valarie, you need to check the trending topics online! Jayden just exposed Brandon to the media for being ungrateful to his lifesaver.]

She pressed her lips together, her thoughts momentarily frozen.

After a brief hesitation, she searched for the news.

A journalist had posted an accusation against Brandon, claiming he had neglected Michelle, the woman who had been injured while saving him. Since her hospitalization, he hadn't visited her once.

The comments were scathing, condemning Brandon as a heartless capitalist with no sense of gratitude.

Across the table, Stefan noticed Valarie's sudden pallor. "Veevee, is something wrong? You look really pale."

His voice pulled her from her thoughts. She quickly placed her phone face down on the table, forcing a smile. "It's nothing, just some news I saw."

Stefan didn't press her further, though his gaze lingered on her phone.

Their food arrived soon after.

After lunch, they went shopping for gifts for Nyla and the baby.

Unlike before, Valarie seemed distracted, lost in her thoughts the entire time.

Stefan considered asking what was wrong but decided against it. If she didn't want to talk, no amount of questioning would change that.

Once they finished shopping, Valarie drove Stefan back to the university.

The car ride was quiet.

When they reached the university's entrance, Valarie finally turned to him. "Stefan, thanks for today. I really appreciate it."

"It's nothing," Stefan replied. "But I noticed you haven't been yourself since lunch. You barely ate, and you seem off. If you ever want to talk about it, I'm always here to listen."

Valarie paused before nodding with a small smile. "Okay, I'll keep that in mind. Take care."

"You too. Drive safe," Stefan said.

After Stefan got out of the car, Valarie drove away.

Charlie rushed into the Sumner Group CEO's office, knocking hastily before speaking. "Mr. Sumner, Mr. Gilmour just publicly accused you of being@ngrateful. He's saying you haven't visited Ms. Snowdenonce since her injury. The Internet is furious, and it's starting to affect the company's image."

Brandon's expression remained cold. "I know. I'll handle it. You can go now."

Once Charlie left, Brandon immediately dialed Jayden's number.

The call was answered almost instantly, and Jayden's voice came through, laced with mockery. "Well, well, aren't you busy? What made you suddenly free to call me?"

Brandon frowned. "Do you really think stirring up online drama will make me give in and visit the hospital?"

Jayden laughed sharply. "If you're not planning to visit, why bother calling me at all?"

"I just want to tell you-stop wasting your time. I'm not going to see Michelle," Brandon spat.

Jayden's voice grew furious. "Has your conscience been eaten by a dog? If it weren't for you, Michelle wouldn't have gotten hurt! She's been in the hospital all this time because of you!"

Brandon's gaze darkened. His voice

was calm, but firm. "You're in love

with her-that's your business.

Chase after her all you want. Burnet

don't expect me to do what you think is right. If it weren't for her, Valarie and I wouldn't have broken up." *śwnovel*

"Don't blame Michelle for everything! You and Valarie broke up because of you! You wanted to stay friends with Michelle while keeping Valarie by your side. You lied to her, which is why your relationship fell apart!" Jayden retorted before slamming the phone down.

Brandon set his phone aside, letting out a bitter laugh.

Jayden was right.

He had been too greedy. Too confident.

He had thought he could balance his relationships with Michelle and Valarie, but all he had done was push things to an irreversible point.

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Brandon's phone rang again.

Seeing it was Damon, he took a deep breath before answering. "Uncle Damon."

"What's going on with this trending news?" Damon asked.

After a brief pause, Brandon replied, "I'll handle it. Don't worry about it."

"I'm asking what happened. You and Jayden are friends. Why are you letting something this small turn into a scandal?" Damon questioned.

"It was my mistake. I promise I'll take care of it today," Brandon assured him.

"Good." Damon didn't say more before hanging up.

Brandon set his phone down and immediately called the PR manager. "Get that trending topic taken down. No matter the cost."

The PR manager hesitated. "Mr. Sumner, we've been trying to remove it. But each time we negotiate, the Gilmour Group raises their bid to keep it up. That's why it's still trending."

Brandon frowned, silent for a long moment.

The manager continued cautiously. "I remember you and Mr. Gilmour are close. Maybe you could speak to him directly and see what it would take for him to drop it?"

Brandon's jaw tightened. "If they raise the price, we raise it higher. Keep going until they give up."

"Mr. Sumner, that's going to be extremely expensive..." the PR manager commented.

It was just a trending topic. They could let it be, but the Sumner Group's reputation would suffer.

"Do as I say," Brandon insisted.

Seeing his unwavering expression, the PR manager nodded. "Understood."

Michelle learned about the trending topic soon after arriving at the hospital. She immediately called Jayden, hoping to convince him to stop.

"Jayden, I know you're doing this to get Brandon to visit me, but it's really not necessary. If he doesn't want to come, forcing him will only make him resent me more," she said.

"You got hurt because of him! Even if you were a stranger, he should at least check on you. The way he's acting is too much. Don't worry. I'll make sure he comes and apologizes to you in person!" Jayden hissed.

Michelle sighed, her voice heavy with helplessness. "Jayden..."

"I have work to do. We'll talk later," Jayden replied, ending the call.

Michelle set her phone down with a smile.

Jayden was so easy to manipulate. All she had to do was act a little sad, and he would do anything for her.

If only she actually liked him. Unfortunately for him, the only man she wanted was Brandon.

Now, all she had to do was wait patiently at the hospital. Sooner or later, Brandon would come to see her.

The thought lifted her spirits, and her smile deepened.

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Valarie drove straight to Nyla's place after leaving Saintosh University.

When she walked into the villa, carrying multiple shopping bags, Nyla widened

her eyes in surprise. "What's all this? Why so many bags?"

Valarie set them down by the couch and sighed. "Gifts for you and the baby. Ugh, I'm exhausted. Get me some water."

Lydia swiftly handed her a glass, which Valarie promptly drained halfway before turning to Nyla. "I had no idea you were pregnant before, but now that I know, I simply had to get something for you and the baby."

Nyla blinked. "Isn't this a little early?"

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"It's not too early. It's just the right time," Valarie replied.

"Alright then," Nyla conceded and sat down beside her. "Well, on behalf of the baby, I'll say thank you in advance."

Valarie reached out and gently touched Nyla's still-flat stomach. Her voice softened.

"Baby, when you're born, your godmother will have an even bigger gift waiting for you."

"What kind of gift?" Nyla asked.

Valarie shot her a playful glance. "You'll find out when the time comes."

As they chatted, Damon returned home.

He was a little surprised to see Valarie but still greeted her, "Ms. Weir."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Sumner," Valarie returned the greeting.

Nyla turned to Damon. "Why are you back so early?"

"I came to grab a file. Figured I'd check in on you while I was here," Damon answered.

Valarie rolled her eyes. "Hey, hey, can you not be so publicly affectionate? Some of us are still single, you know!"

Nyla laughed. "Aren't you getting along pretty well with that younger guy?"

At the mention of Stefan, Valarie let out a sigh. "Who knows where that's going?"

She felt protective of Stefan, but there was no real spark.

Initially, she had been drawn to his looks, but the more they interacted, the more she realized she admired his appearance-nothing more.

Or maybe, she just wasn't interested in any man after Brandon.

Seeing Valarie's downcast expression, Nyla turned to Damon. "You should go get your file."

"Alright," Damon replied.

Once Damon left, Nyla turned back to Valarie. "Did something happen?"

Valarie lowered her gaze, pausing for a long moment before finally saying, "Someone posted online today accusing Brandon of being ungrateful. They said Michelle got hurt saving him, but since she's been in the hospital, he hasn't visited her once.

"The Internet is full of people calling him a heartless capitalist. Oh, and Michelle's the 'friend' he was always so ambiguous about."

She let out a frustrated sigh. "We've already broken up, but his drama still messes with my emotions. It's annoying. Do you think I'm stuck in the past?"

Nyla frowned slightly. "You used to love Tom just as much as you love Brandon now, but when he cheated, managed to move on. Time

makes everything fade.

"It's normal to still have feelings for him. You're not a machine-you can't just flip a switch and stop caring.

"What matters is deciding whether you want a clean break or if there's still a chance for you two."

Valarie ruffled her hair in frustration. "I don't know... I guess I'll wait and see if he can keep his promise not to see Michelle for a month."

"That's fair," Nyla said.

They talked a while longer before Valarie left.

After seeing her off, Nyla turned and headed for the study. She knocked lightly before stepping inside.

Damon was reviewing some documents. Hearing the door open, he looked up and smiled when he saw it was Nyla. He set the papers down. "Valarie left?"

"Yeah. You wanted to talk to me about something?" Nyla asked.

If Damon had only come back for a file, he wouldn't have stayed in the study this long.

He nodded. "Mm. Alexander just contacted me. Edward passed away."

Nyla pressed her lips together. "That has nothing to do with us. Why is he telling you?"

"Because there's a rumor going around that Brian killed him," Damon supplied. Nyla frowned. "Brian lost a leg in a car accident, didn't he? How could he have killed Edward?"

Damon nodded. "He's taking the fall for Emerald. The real culprit is Emerald." Nyla wasn't surprised. Emerald would do anything to take control of the Nixons. "The Nixons must be in chaos right now," she commented.

Damon nodded. "Yeah. Alexander thinks Emerald will probably sacrifice Brian to save herself. Meanwhile, Edward's lover and son are fighting for control. They have Edward's will, and a lot of people in the family are siding with them."

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For the next few years, Emerald would likely be too consumed with internal struggles to trouble Damon and Nyla.

Nyla lowered her gaze. "Either way, what happens in Meristate no longer concerns us. I just want our family to stay together."

"Mm," Damon murmured in agreement.

Over the next few days, Brandon focused solely on suppressing the online accusations of ingratitude. He worked late into the night, desperately trying to contain the fallout.

Jayden stormed into Brandon's office, noticing that Brandon seemed more concerned with the company's reputation than visiting Michelle.

"Brandon, have you lost your mind over Valarie? You need to see Michelle today, no matter what!" Jayden demanded.

Brandon's expression remained cold. "I already told you, I'm not going. I'm busy. Please leave."

Jayden's face darkened as he grabbed the file from Brandon's hands. "Are you really willing to throw away our friendship over a woman?"

"She's not just any woman-she's my girlfriend. The woman I love," Brandon replied.

Jayden pressed, "And what about our years of friendship? What does that mean to you?"

Brandon met his gaze steadily. "I value our friendship, but if you're forcing me to choose, you won't like my answer."

Jayden let out a sharp laugh. "No one forced you! You chose Valarie!"

"Yes, I did. Just like you chose Michelle over me," Brandon shot back.

The office fell silent. Neither of them spoke.

After a long pause, Jayden finally said, "Fine. You don't have to like Michelle. No one expects you to return her feelings. But she saved you. Visiting her in the hospital is the least you can do."

"I promised Valarie I wouldn't see Michelle for a month," Brandon explained.

Jayden's anger flared. "That's it? That's your reason?"

"Yes," Brandon answered firmly.

"You're hopeless, Brandon!" Jayden spat.

He turned sharply and stormed out, slamming the office door behind him.

Half an hour later, Jayden arrived at Michelle's hospital room, still seething.

Seeing his expression, Michelle immediately asked, "Jayden, what's wrong?"

He sat down beside her bed, his face tense. "Michelle, stop waiting. Brandon isn't coming."

Her smile faltered. After a long pause, she forced herself to ask, "What happened?"

"I confronted him. He said he promised Valarie he wouldn't see you for a month," Jayden said.

Michelle pressed her lips together and let out a bitter laugh. "I see... I never really expected him to come anyway."

Seeing her on the verge of tears,

Jed his tone."

too upset. Even if he's not here, still have me... and Yale, an
you Nolan..."

She nodded, but deep down, none of them were Brandon.

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It wasn't long before several shareholders arrived at Brandon's office.

"Mr. Sumner, the negative press

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from the Gilmour Group's online campaign is seriously damaging the company's image. It's been days. What's your plan?"

"Yeah, if you can't suppress it, at least issue a public apology. Or better yet, resign as CEO!"

"Several business partners have Out, asking about already

the situation. If this continues, we might start losing contracts.

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The shareholders continued to talk over each other, giving Brandon no chance to speak.

Only when they fell silent did he ask, "Are you finished?"

"Mr. Sumner, what kind of attitude is this? Your personal affairs caused this whole mess, yet you're acting as if it has nothing to do with you!" one shareholder demanded.

Facing their angry glares, Brandon set the document in his hand aside.

"You've all said quite a bit, but the main point is that you want me to resign, right?" he said. "I can step down, but tell me, who do you plan to put in my place?"

The shareholders exchanged uneasy glances.

After a long pause, the lead shareholder spoke. "There are several capable shareholders in the company. We can select one of them to temporarily take over as CEO of the Sumner Group until you resolve your personal matters. Once that's done, you can return to your position."

Brandon chuckled. "Mr. Dodgson, since you're speaking so confidently, I assume you've already decided on a replacement. Don't tell me you've chosen yourself?"

Wyatt Dodgson frowned. "Mr. Sumner, we can make the decision through an open vote. And for the record, I have no strong desire to replace you."

Brandon nodded. "Fine. Then let's hold a shareholder meeting. I also have a candidate in mind for the interim role."

Since Brandon took over the Sumner Group, Wyatt had been sowing discord between him and the other shareholders. Even if Brandon stepped down, there was no way he'd let Wyatt take his place.

Wyatt narrowed his eyes slightly and smiled. "Alright, then."

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Less than an hour later, all the shareholders of the Sumner Group had gathered in the conference room.

Sitting at the head of the table,

Brandon addressed the group. "First, I want to apologize. Due to my

personal affairs, the company's

public image has taken a hit. I've gathered you here today to make an important announcement."

He swept his gaze across the room, noting the different reactions. "To prevent my personal issues from further affecting the company, I've decided to temporarily step down as CEO of the Sumner Group. The purpose of today's meeting is to elect someone to take over in the interim."

As soon as he finished speaking, the room erupted in discussion.

"Mr. Sumner, this is a minor issue. There's no need for you to resign over it."

"Exactly. This situation hasn't spread widely. Plenty of other companies have had far bigger scandals and still managed just fine."

"I think you're making too big a deal out of this. If you step down now, you'll only be proving their accusations that you're ungrateful. This will blow over soon."

As the shareholders voiced their opinions, Wyatt's expression darkened.

Brandon raised a hand, signaling for silence. "I understand everyone's concerns, but I also want to take this opportunity to rest for a while."

"How long do you plan to be away?" one shareholder asked. "If it's too long, it could destabilize the company."

A company couldn't function properly without its leader.

Over the past few years, they had all witnessed Brandon's growth. He was no longer the reckless young man who made frequent mistakes. He had become a dependable leader, fully capable of steering the Sumner Group forward.

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Brandon smiled. "I haven't set an exact timeline yet, but at a minimum, I'll be gone for a month."

"A month? That's way too long! No, absolutely not. You can take a week at most."

"Exactly. If you disappear for an entire month, the company may fall into chaos. We have several major deals lined up right now. Your absence would definitely cause problems."

The shareholders protested.

Finally, Wyatt spoke up, his voice firm. "Everyone, please calm down. Mr. Sumner has been working non-stop these past few years without a break. It's only reasonable that he take some time off now."

As soon as he finished, another shareholder, Chester Baldwin, sneered. "Of course you'd want Mr. Sumner to take a break, Mr. Dodgson. After all, you've secretly been buying up shares from other shareholders over the past two years."

"You probably hold at least 10% of the company's stock by now, don't you? If Mr. Sumner steps down, you'll have a clear path to becoming the next CEO of the Sumner Group."

There was obvious sarcasm in Chester's voice, but Wyatt remained unfazed.

"Mr. Baldwin, I don't appreciate your insinuations. This meeting was called so we could fairly and openly elect a temporary replacement for Mr. Sumner. The final decision isn't up to me alone. Wouldn't you agree?" Wyatt said.

"Fine," Chester replied. "Since you put it that way, I have nothing more to say. I just hope everyone here makes the right choice and selects the best candidate for

the job."

Wyatt's expression darkened as he shifted his gaze away.

Meanwhile, Brandon ignored the power struggle unfolding in front of him.

"I have a candidate in mind," he announced.

Then, he turned to a shareholder sitting quietly in the corner. "Mr. Minter, would you be interested in temporarily managing the Sumner Group?"

Immediately, all eyes turned to the man in the corner, many filled with disbelief.

Joshua Minter owned only 1% of the company's shares, making him one of the smallest shareholders. He usually sat quietly during meetings, often so unnoticed that he wasn't even invited to major decision-making discussions.

No one had expected Brandon to choose him as his temporary replacement.

Wyatt subtly signaled another

shareholder, who quickly caught on

and spoke up. "Mr. Sumner, Mr. Minter has mostly been a figurehead in the Company. He's never led any major projects and has no experience in corporate

management. Wouldn't appointing him be a bit reckless?"

Brandon smiled. "I'm simply proposing my choice. Whether Mr. Minter accepts

and whether the shareholders agree to his appointment is up to the vote."

An hour later, Wyatt stormed out of the meeting room, his face dark with anger. Behind him, Brandon walked out with a smile.

In the final vote, Joshua won by a single vote, making him the acting CEO of the Sumner Group for the next month.

Brandon wasted no time. Within two hours, he had transferred all his responsibilities to Joshua and instructed his secretary to assist him in overseeing operations for the next month.

With everything settled, Brandon left the Sumner Group.

News of his resignation quickly reached Damon, who immediately called him.

"This is your so-called solution?" Damon asked coldly.

Brandon chuckled. "Uncle Damon, I just want to take a break."

"Have you considered what will happen when you return in a month? Will the shareholders still listen to you?" Damon asked.

"That's exactly why I chose

someone with minimal shares to replace me. In just a month, Joshua won't be able to pose any real threat to me. Besides, my secretary will keep me updated on the company's status every few days," Brandon answered.