

Trading My Ex for His Uncle

C 1331

Damon's tone turned icy as he heard the confidence in Brandon's voice. "You'd better be fully prepared for this."

"Uncle Damon, don't worry about me. I know what I'm doing," Brandon reassured him.

The company wasn't his biggest concern right now. There was something far more important.

During this month off, he was determined to win Valarie back.

As long as he stayed by her side, she wouldn't have time to spend with Stefan.

Once they were back together, after a month, he'd return to work.

It was the perfect plan.

"If that's the case, I have nothing more to say," Damon replied, clearly displeased, before hanging up.

Brandon set down his phone and immediately drove to the Weir Group.

After parking outside, he called Valarie. "Valarie, are you free tonight? Let's have dinner together."

"I'm really busy today. I'll probably be working late," Valarie answered.

"That's fine. I can wait. We could grab a late-night snack instead," Brandon suggested.

There was a brief silence on the other end. A few seconds later, Valarie's calm but firm voice returned. "I mean... no."

"I see... Well, I'm downstairs at your office. I brought you your favorite matcha cake. If you're too busy, I'll leave it at the front desk. You can pick it up whenever you have time," Brandon said.

Valarie frowned slightly, about to respond, but he had already hung up.

Sighing, she set her phone down. She wasn't ready to see Brandon yet-not until she figured out what she really wanted.

Soon after, the receptionist called her. "Ms. Weir, Mr. Sumner left a dessert for you. Would you like me to bring it up?"

"No, you can have it," Valarie replied.

After hanging up, she tried to refocus on her work, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't concentrate.

Eventually, she gave up and decided to take a break.

As Valarie walked out of the office that evening, she spotted Brandon's car parked by the curb. Her steps faltered for a moment.

After a brief hesitation, she walked over and tapped on the window.

The window rolled down, revealing Brandon's face. "Valarie, you're off work?"

Valarie opened the door and got in. "Brandon, we need to talk." "Alright," Brandon said.

"I need you to stop coming to see me. I need this month to figure out whether I even want to continue this relationship," Valarie announced.

The smile on Brandon's face slowly faded. "Valarie, didn't you say that if I avoided Michelle for a month, you'd forgive me? Wasn't that the agreement to get back together?"

"I need time to think. Lately, I've realized there's more to my life than just love," Valarie said.

Love could be a part of her life, but it couldn't consume her. She didn't want to spend so much time and energy maintaining a relationship, especially one that had already made her lose faith in him.

"I understand," Brandon said softly "I'll give you time. We can take things slow. resigned from the Summer Group today. For the next month, my only focus is winning you back."

Valarie frowned, her tone carrying a trace of helplessness. "Brandon, you don't need to do this. You're just making things harder for me."

The car fell silent. So quiet, they could hear each other's breathing.

After a long pause, Brandon spoke again. "Valarie, I know I've disappointed you before. But can you give me one last chance? Just one. If let you down again, I

ve

promise I'll leave you alone forever. Okay?"

Valarie turned her gaze to the window, watching the people pass by outside.

After a long moment, she said quietly, "I'll think about it. I'll give you an answer in a few days."

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Valarie opened the door and stepped out.

After she left, Brandon pulled out his phone and dialed Yale. "Got time for a drink tonight?"

"Sure. But last I checked, Valarie keeps a tight leash on you. You sure you can go drinking?" Yale asked.

Hearing the teasing in Yale's voice, Brandon lowered his gaze. "She doesn't care what I do anymore."

She didn't even want him now, so why would she care if he went out drinking?

"Alright then. I'll call Nolan and Jayden. You and Jayden need to settle your beef anyway. You two fighting online all the time is just making people laugh at you," Yale grunted.

Brandon frowned. "If you invite him, I'm not going. I don't want to see him."

If Jayden showed up, the first thing he'd do was try to convince him to see Michelle. And right now, just hearing her name annoyed him.

If it weren't for Michelle, things wouldn't have spiraled so far between him and Valarie.

"Fine, fine. I won't call him. See you at the usual place," Yale said.

"Yeah," Brandon hummed.

He hung up and drove straight to the bar.

Not long after, Nolan and Yale arrived.

Seeing that Brandon had ordered several bottles of hard liquor, Yale raised an eyebrow and took a seat across from him. "Brandon, what's really going on between you and Jayden? I heard Michelle got hurt saving you, and you haven't even visited her once?"

Brandon downed his drink in one gulp. "No, I haven't."

"That's kind of harsh, don't you think? Even if you don't like her, she's still been our friend for years," Yale pointed out.

"When I brought Valarie to meet you guys, you saw how Michelle and Jayden kept making digs at her. I

made it clear that I don't want to

attend any gathering where Michelle is present. But Jayden keeps tricking me into showing up anyway," Brandon explained.

"Besides, every time Michelle is there, Valarie just happens to find out and show up too. You really think that's a coincidence?" he asked.

It was obvious. Either Jayden or Michelle had been feeding Valarie information.

Yale sighed. "Man, I don't get your whole tangled mess. You and Valarie should be together, and Jayden should just date Michelle. Wouldn't that be easier than all this drama?"

"Valarie said she'll forgive me if I stay away from Michelle for a month. So no matter what Jayden or Michelle try, I'm not seeing her," Brandon said.

It was cruel to Michelle, but if Yale had to choose between his girlfriend and his friend, he knew which one he'd pick too.

"I get it." Yale nodded. "I'll try talking to Jayden. When it comes to Michelle, though... that's out of my hands."

The only reason they had ever gotten close to Michelle in the first place was that she and Jayden had grown up together. She'd always been part of their group.

But if they were talking about real friendships, her strongest connection was still with Jayden.

To be honest, Yale had always felt that Michelle was a little manipulative.

She knew damn well that Jayden liked her but still played innocent and used him to get closer to Brandon. And now, she'd successfully driven a wedge between Brandon and Valarie.

"Don't worry about it," Brandon said, swirling his drink. "I don't care what they do."

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At present, nothing mattered to Brandon except Valarie. If Jayden insisted on forcing him to see Michelle, their friendship might not survive.

Yale nodded. "Got it. I'll mention it, but I won't push it if he doesn't listen."

He and Nolan had a clear view of the situation and weren't planning on getting too involved. They didn't want to end up stuck in the middle, trying to please both sides and failing.

The news of Brandon stepping down as CEO of the Sumner Group spread quickly through Saintornia.

As soon as Michelle heard about it, she called Jayden.

"Jayden, I just saw online that Brandon resigned as CEO of the Sumner Group. What's going on?" Her voice trembled with worry.

There was a brief silence on the other end before Jayden responded in a low voice. "I don't know yet. I'll ask around."

"Jayden, do you think it's because of that exposé you had someone post online? Maybe you should have them take it down. I want to see him, but I don't want him to leave the Sumner Group because of me," Michelle said.

The line went silent after she spoke.

After a few seconds, with no response, Michelle frowned. "Jayden? What's wrong? Why aren't you saying anything? If you're busy, I can call you later." "No, it's fine," Jayden said flatly. "I'll take care of it. You should rest."

With that, he hung up.

Michelle was too focused on the news of Brandon's resignation to notice the odd tone in Jayden's voice. Even if she had, she probably wouldn't have cared.

After all, she had always believed Jayden liked her so much he would never leave her, no matter what.

Jayden set his phone down and called his assistant into the office. "Contact the blogger who posted the exposé about Brandon being ungrateful and have them delete all their posts. Also, remove any trending topics related to it. Get it done by tomorrow morning."

The assistant looked puzzled, staring at him in disbelief.

Just half an hour ago, Jayden had ordered them to buy more bot traffic to amplify the controversy. Why the sudden change of heart?

Seeing the hesitation, Jayden frowned. "Did you not understand what I just said?"

"I-I did, Mr. Gilmour. I'll take care of it right away," the assistant replied.

After the assistant left, Jayden rubbed his temples, frustration flooding over him.

He had almost completely burned his bridge with Brandon for

Michelle's sake. Yet, then whet

she learned Brandon had resigned, she wanted everything taken down.

It was clear now-he never really mattered to her.

The only reason she had been kind to him was probably to use him to get closer to Brandon.

Before, as long as he could see

Michelle smile, he felt content. He endured the heartache of helping her pursue Brandon, agreeing to her every unreasonable request.

But now, for the first time, he wondered what the point was. No matter how much effort he put in, she would never look back at him.

Maybe it was time to let go and start over.

As Jayden pondered this, his phone rang again.

His heart skipped a beat.

He picked it up, seeing Yale's name on the screen.

A flash of disappointment crossed his face. For a moment, he had hoped it was Michelle, realizing something was wrong and calling him back.

Clearly, he was fooling himself.

Pushing aside his emotions, he answered the call.

"What's up?" Jayden asked.

"You free for dinner tonight?" Yale invited.

Jayden checked his schedule—no meetings, no social engagements.

Raising an eyebrow, he asked, "Who else is coming?"

"Just the two of us," Yale replied.

"Alright, send me the details," Jayden said.

That evening, Jayden pulled up in front of a high-end restaurant in Saintornia.

As he stepped out of his car, Yale's voice came from the side. "Jayden, what a coincidence. We arrived at the same time."

Jayden looked over, then waited for Yale to catch up before they walked inside together.

Once seated in a private room, Jayden studied Yale. "You asked me to dinner alone. There must be something you want to talk about."

Yale chuckled. "Can't hide anything from you. Let's order first."

After placing their orders and the server left, Yale leaned back and met Jayden's gaze. "What's your plan with Michelle and Brandon? Are you really trying to set them up?"

Jayden's fingers tightened slightly around his glass. His voice was calm but firm. "Yeah. Why?"

Yale frowned. "You like Michelle, don't you? If she ends up with Brandon, won't you regret it?"

Jayden let out a bitter laugh. "What does it matter if I like her? She doesn't like me."

Yale sighed. "If only you were this clear-headed about her feelings for Brandon. He doesn't like her either, but you keep pushing him to see her. All you're doing is making everyone miserable."

Even if Brandon and Valarie broke up, he still wouldn't end up with Michelle.

Jayden looked at Yale. "So, you brought me here just to convince me to stop helping Michelle?"

"I'm not telling you to stop helping her. I'm telling you to let things go," Yale suggested.

Jayden took a sip of water, his expression unreadable. "Did Brandon send you?"

"No. You're all my friends, and I don't want things to get so bad that we can't even sit down for a meal together anymore," Yale said.

Jayden grunted. "If Brandon had just gone to see Michelle at the hospital once, we wouldn't be in this mess."

"You keep forcing him to do something he doesn't want to do. Of course he's going to resist." Yale sighed. "Jayden, I really think you should stay out of whatever's going on between him and Michelle."

Jayden remained silent, his face unreadable. It was hard to tell if he was even listening.

Seeing that he wasn't responding, Yale didn't press further. Instead, he shifted the conversation to work.

After dinner, the two left the restaurant together.

As they walked through the lobby, Jayden suddenly froze.

"What is it?" Yale asked.

He followed Jayden's gaze and was surprised by what he saw.

Qu

By the window, Valarie was having dinner with Stefan. They were chatting as they ate, and she kept picking food for him, piling his plate high.

"Veevee, I really can't eat anymore. Please, stop giving me food," Stefan protested.

Seeing how full his plate was, Valarie chuckled and set down her utensils.

"Alright, I'll stop. Take your time."

"Okay." Stefan glanced at her, hesitated, then cautiously asked, "Why did you suddenly ask me to dinner today?"

"What? You don't want me to?" Valarie asked.

"No, no, of course not. I'm just... surprised," Stefan replied.

He was used to being the one sending her messages every day, often receiving

only a few responses in return.

Today, he'd been too busy with

classes to text her. Then, out of the

blue, she reached out to him first. When she did, she mentioned she was already at Saintosh University.

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It usually took Stefan ten minutes to walk from the dorm to the school gate, but today, he made it in just five.

The moment he saw Valarie, a wave of happiness surged inside him.

He knew it now. He had truly fallen for her.

"I had some errands nearby and happened to pass by your school. Then I remembered I still had something to give you," Valarie explained.

Stefan raised an eyebrow in curiosity. "What is it?"

"You'll find out later. Let's eat first," she suggested.

Stefan nodded. "Okay."

Neither Valarie nor Stefan noticed Jayden, who had secretly taken a photo of them from a distance.

Behind Jayden, Yale frowned. "Jayden, isn't it a bit inappropriate to secretly take photos of Valarie?"

Jayden glanced at him. "What's wrong with it? She's the one sneaking around on Brandon, having dinner with another man. I'm just taking a picture. What's the big deal?"

"But Valarie and Brandon broke up. She's free to date whoever she wants now. Besides... that guy could be her younger brother or something," Yale reasoned. "Her brother? Have you ever heard of her having a brother?" Jayden retorted.

Yale fell silent.

"Alright, I've got something to take care of later, so I'll head out first. See you next time," Jayden said.

Yale wanted to argue more, but before he could, Jayden had already walked away, his figure disappearing from sight.

After leaving the restaurant, Jayden drove straight to the hospital.

Michelle was reading a book in the hospital room. When she heard the door open, she instinctively looked up.

Upon seeing Jayden, her face brightened with surprise and delight. "Jayden, what are you doing here at this hour? Finished with work?"

"Yeah." Jayden walked over to the hospital bed and sat down, his gaze fixed on her. "How's your recovery going?"

"I'm doing well. The doctor says I should be able to leave next week But... guess Brandon won't be

visiting before then, will heiket

Michelle mumbled.

Before, Jayden would have comforted her, promising to find a way to bring Brandon to see her. But tonight, he said nothing. His silence felt strange.

Noticing something was off, Michelle studied him closely. "Jayden, why aren't you saying anything?"

Without a word, Jayden pulled out his phone, handed it to her, and showed her the photo he had taken at the restaurant.

When Michelle saw Valarie and Stefan, her eyes filled with disbelief.

She gasped. "Why are Stefan and Valarie... having dinner together?"

Jayden had been watching her face closely, searching for any signs of deception.

He saw none.

He lowered his phone, his tone becoming cold. "Why are they having dinner together? Don't you already know the reason?"

Michelle froze for a moment, then her eyes filled with hurt. "Jayden, what are you implying? Are you suggesting I sent Stefan to get close to Valarie?"

"What else am I supposed to think? Most people don't know about your connection to Stefan, but I do. Don't tell me it's just a coincidence that Stefan and Valarie know each other," Jayden pressed.

His accusatory tone seemed to cut deep, leaving Michelle visibly shaken.

Tears welled up in her eyes. "Jayden, do you really think I'm that manipulative?"

"Shouldn't I? Stefan is your half-brother. There's no way he doesn't know about Valarie and Brandon's past. Are you seriously. going to tell me you had nothing to do with him getting close to her?" Jayden demanded.

Stefan was still in university. He wouldn't have met Valarie naturally without some sort of setup.

"I don't know anything about it. If you don't believe me, I can call Stefan right now!" Michelle cried.

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Michelle reached for her phone on the table.

Just before her fingers could brush it, Jayden's hand shot out faster, snatching it away.

She looked up at Jayden, her teary eyes flashing with defiance. "Give me back my phone!"

Jayden took a deep breath and spoke slowly. "Michelle, it's not too late to stop. If you really did send Stefan to get close to Valarie, then tell him to back off."

Michelle nodded. "Fine. No matter what I say, you won't believe me. So, let's say I did send him. What are you going to do? Tell Brandon?"

Jayden fell silent, unsure of how to respond. Before coming here, he hadn't even considered what he would do if Michelle was behind this.

Would he tell Brandon? Or pretend he didn't know?

"Whether you were behind this or not, you need to call Stefan and tell him to stop seeing Valarie. If Brandon finds out about your relationship, he won't believe anything you say again," Jayden warned.

Michelle's eyes filled with disappointment. "So, you don't believe me either?"

"I want to, but..." Jayden trailed off.

Michelle's voice cracked as she cried, "Enough! Just go. I don't want to see you right now."

"Michelle..." Jayden's tone softened, almost pleading.

Michelle yelled, "Go! Just leave! If you don't trust me, then let's stop seeing each other altogether!"

Tears streamed down her face. She wiped them away and turned her head, refusing to look at him again.

The hospital room fell silent. Neither of them spoke.

After a long moment, Jayden placed her phone back on the table and walked out.

As the door clicked shut, Michelle finally lost control, sweeping everything off the bedside table in a fit of rage.

Jayden lingered outside for a few seconds before walking away.

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Valarie drove Stefan back to his dorm after dinner.

Throughout the ride, Stefan seemed like he wanted to say something but kept hesitating.

When the car finally stopped outside

the university's main gate, he

couldn't hold it in any longer. "Veeyee, back at the restaurant, you said you had something for me. What is it?"

Valarie smiled at the curiosity in his eyes. "Get out of the car first."

Stefan hesitated. "You're not going to trick me into getting out and then just drive off, are you?"

Valarie laughed. "I wouldn't do that."

"Alright, I trust you." Stefan stepped out.

Valarie followed and walked to the back of the car, popping the trunk.

Inside, neatly stacked, were all the clothes Stefan had helped her pick out at the mall the other day.

Stefan's eyes widened in shock. "These clothes..."

"They're all for you," Valarie said with a smile.

Stefan gasped. "But... I thought you said they were for a friend's birthday?"

Valarie suddenly pulled a small cake from behind her back and held it out to him. "Yeap, you're that friend. You didn't forget your own birthday, did you?"

BAUMS

did

Stefan froze for a moment before realizing that Valarie must have seen his ID.

The birthdate on his ID was today,

months away. He had

his real birthday was

he celebrated his birthday

before.

Seeing his silence, Valarie raised an eyebrow. "What's wrong? Did I get the date wrong?"

Her voice snapped him back to reality. He quickly shook his head. "No, you got it right. It's today."

"Then make a wish," Valarie said, lighting the candle and holding the cake out to him.

As Stefan stared at the candle, an unreadable emotion flickered in his eyes. He pressed his hands together, closed his eyes, and made a wish.

After a moment, he opened his eyes and blew out the candle. "Thank you, Veevee."

"No need to thank me. But I'm curious-what did you wish for?" Valarie asked.

Stefan smiled. "If I tell you, it won't come true, right?"

"Fair enough. Here, this is your birthday present," Valarie said.

When Stefan saw the black box she handed him, he looked surprised. "Isn't the present all those clothes?"

"Those were just extras. This is the real gift," Valarie replied.

Stefan hesitated, taking the box. "Can I open it now?"

Valarie nodded. "Of course."

He carefully untied the ribbon and lifted the lid. As soon as he saw what was inside, shock flashed across his face.

"This is..." he murmured.

Inside the box was a key.

"I bought you an apartment near the university. That way, you won't have to stay in the dorms anymore," Valarie explained.

Stefan immediately shut the box and handed it back. "This is too much. I can't accept it."

The clothes were already more than generous. If he accepted the apartment too, he would feel even more guilty.

"Our company has a partnership with the developer of that complex. The apartment was a gift from them, so I didn't actually pay for it. You don't need to feel burdened," Valarie clarified.

Stefan shook his head. "I really can't accept it. The clothes alone are more than enough. Please take this back."

Even if the apartment was a gift, its market value was still in the millions. He couldn't accept it in good conscience.

Besides, the reason he had approached Valarie in the first place wasn't exactly pure.

Seeing how firm Stefan was, Valarie had no choice but to take the box back. "Alright then."

As she put the key away, Stefan felt a sense of relief. "Veevee, I really appreciate you celebrating my birthday today. I won't forget it."

"It's nothing. It's getting late. Head back inside," Valarie replied.

She packed up the cake and handed him the shopping bags filled with clothes from the trunk.

"Can you carry everything?" she asked.

"Yeah. Thank you," Stefan said again.

Valarie waved him off. "Enough with the thank-yous. Go on, now."

She watched as Stefan walked back into campus before driving away.

...

The moment Stefan returned to his dorm, his phone rang.

It was Michelle.

"How's it going with Valarie?" she asked.

Stefan glanced at the clothes piled on the floor and the cake sitting on the desk.

He stood up and stepped onto the balcony.

"Pretty good," he answered.

Michelle let out a cold laugh. "Stefan,

I don't want to hear empty words When are you going to sleep with her? When are you going to get me some real proof?"

"She's not letting me get too close yet. I need more time to build trust," Stefan explained.

"Hah. Well your dear home-wrecking

mother's next medical bill is due in

ten days. If I don't get what I want by then figure it out yourself," Michelle threatened before hanging up.

Stefan put his phone away and stood on the balcony for a long while before finally heading back inside.

As soon as he sat down, one of his roommates walked over. "Stefan, is it your birthday today? Why'd you get a cake?"

Stefan glanced at the cake. "No, I just felt like eating one."

He picked it up and handed it to his roommate. "But now that I bought it, I don't

really feel like eating it anymore. You guys can have it."

"Damn, you're the best! I won't say

no,

Cathe

His roommate grabbed the
noticed Stefan was
holding onto the cake box's ribbon.

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"I've got it. You can let go. I promise I won't drop it," Stefan's roommate reassured him.

Stefan's fingers tightened briefly before he slowly released his grip. "Yeah."
His roommate carried the cake over to the others, calling them to share. He kept a piece for Stefan.

That piece remained untouched until Stefan went to bed.

Over the next few days, Brandon appeared at the Weir Group every day.

Sometimes, he brought food; other times, flowers.

Valarie was beyond annoyed. She'd told him repeatedly to stop pestering her, but he refused to listen. Eventually, she ignored him altogether.

On Friday evening, Valarie spotted Brandon's car parked by the curb as soon as she stepped out of the office.

By then, she was used to seeing him there. She walked directly to her car, pretending he didn't exist.

Just as she reached it, Brandon called out from behind, "Valarie."

Valarie pressed her lips together and turned to face him. "What do you want?"

"Valarie, are you free tonight?" he asked.

"No, I have plans," Valarie replied.

Brandon's face darkened. "With Stefan?"

Valarie frowned. "What does that have to do with you? I don't owe you an explanation."

Before Brandon could respond, his phone rang.

Seeing it was his secretary, he hesitated but eventually answered. "What is it?"

Whatever was said on the other end changed his expression. He immediately replied, "Got it. I'll be there right away."

He hung up and looked at Valarie. "I have something urgent to handle. When will you be free?"

"Take care of your business first. I'll let you know when I am," Valarie answered.

Brandon frowned, sensing she was brushing him off, but the situation at work was pressing.

"Alright then. Be careful driving," he said before leaving.

Afterward, Valarie drove straight to Nyla's place.

Valarie sighed. "Nyla, how do I get him to stop pestering me?"

The past few days had drained her. She wasn't sure whether to reject Brandon outright or give him another chance.

Nyla raised an eyebrow. "Didn't you say you'd reconsider only after he'd gone a whole month without seeing Michelle?"

"Yeah, but I don't want to deal with him for a whole month before that," Valarie complained.

Nyla

ested, "Then just ignore
him. Or work from home for a while.

He can't exactly barge into you!!!!
house, can he?"

Valarie nodded. "Why didn't I think of that? I'm working from home starting tomorrow!"

After hanging out a bit longer, Valarie noticed Nyla looked tired, so she got up to leave.

Not long after, Nyla, feeling exhausted, lay down on the couch and soon fell asleep.

When

study,

wallon stepped out of his
saw her asleep.t

Quietly, he

over, scooped her up, and
d her upstairs.

Since Nyla had gotten pregnant, she'd been constantly sleepy-even yawning at
the dinner table.

After tucking her in, Damon left the room.

Downstairs, Mason ran up to him,
up a freshly drawn picture.

O a freshly drawn picture. look! My teacher asked us to our family. How did I do?"

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Damon lowered his head to look at Mason and took the drawing from his hands.

The picture showed a family of four-him, Nyla, Mason, and a little girl-standing under a bright blue sky with fluffy white clouds.

Damon smiled and pointed to the little girl in the drawing. "Who's this?"

"That's my little sister. I hope Mommy gives me a baby sister," Mason said earnestly.

"What if it's a baby brother instead?" Damon asked.

Mason paused, then nodded confidently. "If it's a brother, I'll protect him too."

Damon's smile deepened at Mason's innocent expression. "Well, it looks like our Buddy is growing up. You're already thinking about protecting your little sibling." "Daddy, when are you and Mommy going to give me a little sibling?" Mason asked.

"Soon. It won't be long now," Damon answered.

Mason's eyes widened with excitement. "Really? Daddy, you're not lying to me, are you?"

"Of course not. When have I ever lied to you?" Damon asked.

Mason huffed. "You've lied to me plenty of times."

Like that time Damon said he'd be back from Meristate in two days, but he had been gone for so long! If he hadn't returned with Nyla, Mason wouldn't have forgiven him so easily.

Damon chuckled. "Alright, alright. I know I was wrong. I promise I'll try to lie to you less in the future. How's that?"

Mason remained silent, clearly skeptical.

Damon ruffled his son's hair and stood up. "Buddy, I have some work to do now. Mommy is sleeping, so don't wake her up. Stay in the living room and play by yourself. If you need anything, come find me in the study, okay?"

"Got it!" Mason chirped.

Back in the study, Damon picked up his phone and dialed Spencer. "Come over to the villa. I need you to do something."

Half an hour later, Spencer knocked on the study door. "Mr. Sumner."

Damon set down the document he was reading and looked up. "I want to start planning a wedding for Nyla. Contact a wedding planning company and ask them to put together a few proposals."

Spencer's eyes flashed with surprise, but he quickly composed himself and nodded. "Understood. Do you have any specific preferences for the theme or style?"

"Let the planners come up with some options first. I'll review them and make any necessary adjustments," Damon replied.

"Got it. If there's nothing else, I'll get started on the arrangements," Spencer said. Damon hummed in agreement.

After Spencer left, Damon called Brandon. "Send me Valarie's contact information."

"Uncle Damon, why do you need Valarie's contact info?" Brandon asked.

"I need to discuss something with her," Damon replied.

"Oh. I'll send it to you in a bit," Brandon said.

A moment later, Brandon sent the contact.

Damon hesitated for a moment before adding her.

A few minutes later, Valarie accepted his friend request and sent him a question mark.

Damon: [This is Damon Sumner. Do you have time tomorrow? I'd like to talk to you about something.]

Valarie replied quickly.

Valarie: [Is this about Brandon?]

Damon: [No, it has nothing to do with him.]

Valarie: [Alright, I'm free.]

After setting up the time and place, Damon specifically asked Valarie not to tell Nyla about their meeting before putting down his phone and getting back to work.

...

The next morning at 10:00 a.m., Damon and Valarie met at a café near the Weir Group.

As soon as Valarie sat down, she raised an eyebrow at Damon. "Mr. Sumner, what's this about? You were all secretive, even telling me not to mention it to Nyla. You didn't do something to betray her, did you?"

Without a word, Damon slid a document across the table toward her. "Ms. Weir, I need your help filling out this questionnaire."

Valarie picked it up and flipped through the pages. The first question read: [What is Nyla's favorite color?]

She skimmed through the document-over 500 questions, all about Nyla.

She looked up at him. "Mr. Sumner, can I ask what this is for?"

"I'm planning a wedding for Nyla. Since you've been her best friend for years, you probably know her preferences better than anyone, f'd like you to help me fill this out so I can tailor everything to her liking," Damon explained.

II

Trading My Ex for His Uncle

Valarie widened her eyes in surprise. "Alright, but there are a lot of questions here. It might take me a day or two to finish. You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"No rush, but the sooner, the better. I really appreciate your help," Damon said.

Seeing the sincerity in his eyes, Valarie smiled. "It's no trouble at all. I'm happy to help with the wedding preparations."

After parting ways with Damon, Valarie returned to her office.

As soon as she sat down, her phone rang. It was Brandon.

"Valarie, what did my uncle want? Did he give you a hard time?" he asked.

Hearing the tension in his voice, Valarie set the file down. "Why would you think he would give me a hard time?"

There was a brief silence before Brandon spoke again, his voice low. "I was worried he might blame you for my decision to leave the Sumner Group."

"You're overthinking it. He asked me to help with something unrelated. If there's nothing else, I'm hanging up," Valarie replied.

"Valarie " Brandon began.

Before he could finish, Valarie ended the call.

Hearing the disconnected tone, Brandon smiled helplessly and put his phone away.

Two days later, Valarie completed Damon's questionnaire. For the questions she wasn't sure about, she casually brought them up with Nyla to get accurate answers.

She handed the completed form to Damon. "This questionnaire nearly drained me. You better make this wedding perfect. I don't want my hard work to go to waste!"

Damon took the document, his expression serious. "Thank you. Don't worry. I'll make sure Nyla has the perfect wedding."

"Then I'll be looking forward to it," Valarie replied.

Back at his office, Damon reviewed Valarie's answers carefully before calling Spencer and the wedding planners to go over the details.

For the next several days, Damon was out early and home late, completely absorbed in the wedding plans.

By Friday night, he had another long meeting with the wedding planners and didn't return home until after 10:00 p.m.

He was surprised to find Nyla still awake, watching TV on the couch.

"Nyla, why are you still up? It's late," Damon asked.

Since becoming pregnant, Nyla had been sleeping much earlier-sometimes even by 8:00 p.m.

Nyla turned to him, her expression serious. "Come here. We need to talk."

Damon changed his shoes and sat beside her. "What's wrong?"

"You tell me. Why have you been working so late every night? Every time I call Spencer, he says you're still at the office, but I asked the other shareholders, and they said there

aren't any major projects right now. Are you just using work as an excuse to avoid coming home?" she asked.

Seeing the frustration in her eyes, Damon reached out to pull her into his arms, but she pulled away.

"Not until you explain yourself," she demanded.

Even when upset, she was adorable.

Damon coaxed, "Nyla, you're pregnant. You shouldn't be getting so worked up."

Nyla glared at him. "If you know that,

why have you been coming

late

and leaving so early?

even seen you in days."

Pregnancy had made her more sensitive, and with Damon barely home, even small things felt more upsetting.

Damon sighed. "I haven't actually

been

somerking. I've been planning et

else. But I can't tell you

yet. You'll find out soon enough."

She frowned. "Why can't you tell me now? Why must it wait?"

"Because I want it to be a surprise for you. If I tell you now, it won't be a surprise, will it?" Damon replied.