

Trading My Ex for His Uncle

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Trading My Ex for His Uncle

Just as the bodyguard was only a few steps away from Stefan, he let out a cold laugh. "Take one more step, and I'll slit her throat right now."

The bodyguard froze, hesitating.

Michelle's sharp voice echoed. "Don't come any closer! Get away!"

She had just felt the blade press harder against her neck.

Stefan was a lunatic-he'd actually do it!

The more she thought about it, the more terrified she became.

Right then, the distant wail of police sirens cut through the night, growing louder as they approached.

A flicker of relief flashed in Michelle's eyes. Her bodyguards must have secretly called the police.

She was safe!

Within moments, five police cars pulled up, surrounding them as a dozen police officers stepped out.

Seeing the police, Stefan lowered the knife.

Michelle seized the moment and bolted toward the police officers. "Officers, arrest him! He held me at knifepoint! He was going to kill me!"

She was still catching her breath when one of the police officers turned to her with a stern expression. "Ms. Snowden, we've received a report linking you to a kidnapping case. You'll need to come with us for questioning."

Michelle's eyes widened in disbelief. "What? Kidnapping? You must be mistaken

"There's no mistake," the police officer interrupted. "The report was filed by Stefan Foley himself. You're all coming with us to the station."

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Valarie woke up in a police station, eyes filled with confusion and disbelief.

What was going on?

The last thing she remembered was having dinner with Stefan. Everything had been fine until she suddenly felt dizzy and blacked out.

A female police officer approached. "Ms. Weir, you're awake. How are you feeling? Any discomfort?"

Valarie shook her head, still dazed.

Before

He could respond, she saw

Ovelet

rushing in from the

He looked exhausted.

She stood up. "Brandon, you-"

Before she could finish, he pulled her into a tight embrace.

The force of it startled her, and she instinctively tried to pull away. "Brandon, what are you doing? Let go!"

They were in a police station, for god's sake. Was he not embarrassed?

It was a long while before Brandon finally released her.

"Valarie, stay here. I'll take care of everything," he said firmly.

He had barely gotten off the plane when his assistant called, telling him Michelle had been arrested for kidnapping Valarie and that Valarie was now at the police station.

On the way over, he'd been gripped with fear-afraid she had been hurt.

Fortunately, she was okay.

Still confused, Valarie frowned. "What's happening? Why am I here?"

"I'll explain later. Don't worry, I'll handle everything. Just wait here," Brandon assured her.

"Oh..." Valarie muttered.

After Brandon left with the female police officer, she sat down, still full of questions.

A while later, the same female police officer returned with another police officer to take her statement. It was only then that she learned she had been kidnapped.

She froze. "That can't be right. Are you sure? How could I have been kidnapped?"

She had spent enough time around Stefan to believe she understood him. He wasn't the type to do something like this.

That said, she had blacked out suddenly at dinner. That part was suspicious...

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"It's true, Ms. Weir. Let's proceed with your statement first," the police officer said.

Valarie had little to say. She had passed out so quickly that she couldn't remember anything afterward. The police officers only asked about her meeting with Stefan.

During the questioning, Valarie learned the truth-Stefan had invited her out with the intent to kidnap her, and he had gone through with it.

Once they finished, the police officer said, "Thank you for your cooperation, Ms. Weir. You're free to go now. Please stay home and wait for further updates."

Valarie nodded. "Alright, thank you."

As she stepped out of the interrogation room, Brandon was waiting. "Valarie, let's go home."

She turned to him. "Brandon, I want to see Stefan."

She needed to understand why he had kidnapped her and why he had called the police afterward.

Brandon frowned. "You should already know that he and Michelle are half-siblings. He approached you with an agenda from the start. What's the point of seeing him now?"

"I want to ask him why he kidnapped me but then changed his mind and reported it," Valarie replied.

Brandon retorted, "Does that even matter? The fact is, he tried to hurt you. Why do you still want to see him?"

"It matters to me," Valarie answered.

Brandon took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Fine. Go see him. I'll wait outside."

Without another word, he turned and left, frustration evident in his stride.

Ten minutes later, Valarie sat across from Stefan in the holding room.

Seeing her, Stefan smiled. "Veevee, I didn't think you'd actually want to see me again."

Valarie met his gaze with a blank expression. "Why did you call the police?"

"Because I changed my mind. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in prison," Stefan said flatly.

"You're lying. You never planned to follow Michelle's orders, did you?" Valarie countered.

Stefan's smile faltered. "Veevee, you're overthinking things. I just had second thoughts."

Valarie lowered her gaze, silent for a long moment, then murmured, "Then let's just say I'm overthinking it."

She asked no more questions and stood to leave.

As she turned, Stefan's smile faded completely. His eyes remained fixed on her back, filled with reluctance.

He had never intended to kidnap her.

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The Snowdens had influence in Saintornia, but they were no match for the Sumners or the Weirs. As long as Brandon and the Weirs pressured the case, Michelle would surely be convicted.

Once that happened, Valarie would finally be safe.

This was the only thing Stefan could do for her.

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Outside the station, Valarie saw Brandon leaning against the car, smoking. She quickened her pace toward him.

Hearing her approach, he looked up and flicked the cigarette into a nearby trash
can.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Mm. Brandon, there's something I want to explain," Valarie said.

"Get in the car." Brandon opened the backseat door and got in first.

Sensing his cold demeanor, Valarie pressed her lips together before following him inside.

Once she sat down, Brandon told the driver to start the car.

"Brandon, about meeting with Stefan tonight—" Valarie began.

Brandon cut her off, "You don't have to explain. That's your business, and I trust you."

Valarie took a deep breath and

looked at him seriously. "But the way

you're acting right now, it does seem like you're upset. I just want to explain everything so there's no misunderstanding between us."

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"If you really didn't want any misunderstandings between us, you wouldn't have met him today, especially behind my back," Brandon said coldly.

Seeing the anger in his eyes, Valarie nodded. "I admit I should've told you. But he invited me to dinner to thank me for covering his mother's medical bills. He even suggested I bring you along, but you were out of town for work, so I didn't mention it."

Brandon let out a sharp laugh. "Was it because I was away, or did you never plan to tell me in the first place?"

Valarie frowned. "Do you have to twist my words like that? You were on a business trip. If I told you, you'd just overthink it. That's why I kept quiet."

"So I should be grateful you were looking out for me, is that it?" Brandon shot back.

"If you're going to keep talking to me like this, there's no point in continuing this conversation. Ron, stop at the next intersection. I'll take a cab home," Valarie said.

Ron Gibson, the driver, hesitated and glanced at Brandon. "Mr. Sumner..."

Brandon's expression was icy. "Keep driving. Don't worry about it."

"Brandon, I said I want to get out. Did you not hear me?" Valarie snapped.

"Do you even realize what time it is?"

Valarie's face darkened. "What difference does that make? I don't want to be in the same space as you right now."

She just wanted him gone. Seeing him only made her angrier.

Brandon remained unfazed. "Relax. We'll be at your place in ten minutes. You can get out then."

"I don't want to stay in this car for another minute," Valarie huffed.

Brandon said nothing and simply turned to stare out the window, making it clear he had no interest in arguing further.

The air in the car grew heavier, the tension thick and suffocating.

Ten minutes later, they pulled up in front of Valarie's home.

She turned to Ron. "Thanks for driving me home."

Without so much as a glance at Brandon, she stepped out and slammed the door shut.

Ron sneaked a cautious look at his employer. "Mr. Sumner..."

"Let's go," Brandon said flatly.

"Yes, sir," Ron answered quickly.

As Valarie reached her front door, she heard the car pulling away.. Turning back, she caught only a glimpse of its taillights disappearing around the corner.

Back in her bedroom, she tossed her bag onto the couch, pulled out her phone,

and dialed Nyla.

"Nyla, what are you up to?"

"Just about to go to bed. What's up?"

Valarie sighed and launched into the details of her argument with Brandon.

By the end, she huffed. "I already

explained everything. What more et

does he want? I didn't do anything wrong, so why is he acting like I betrayed him?"

Nyla was silent for a moment before saying, "Honestly, I get why he's upset. He already doesn't like Stefan, and you met him without telling him.

"Now, imagine if the roles were reversed. If Brandon secretly met up with Michelle, wouldn't you be mad?"

"That's different!" Valarie exclaimed.

"How?" Nyla challenged.

"He's lied to me about Michelle multiple times. And Michelle clearly has feelings for him!"

Nyla chuckled. "And you think Stefan doesn't have feelings for you? You saw him all the time when you and Brandon broke up.

"Come on, Valarie, it's normal to feel

protective in a relationship. If you

want to make things right,

just

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apologize sincerely and make it up to him. He'll get over it."

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Valarie sighed. "Fine. I'll think of something..."

"Good. I have to be up early tomorrow, so I'll talk to you later. Goodnight," Nyla said.

After hanging up, Valarie stared at her phone for a while before opening her chat with Brandon. She started typing but couldn't bring herself to send anything.

Forget it. He was still mad. She'd deal with it tomorrow.

Setting her phone down, she got up to take a shower.

...

When Valarie woke up the next morning, the first thing she did was check her phone.

Nothing. Not a single message.

Brandon would always text her "good morning" first thing every day.

But today? Silence.

He was probably still mad.

Pushing aside her disappointment, she got up, showered, dressed, and headed to work.

She had meant to apologize last night, but for some reason, it felt even harder today.

The entire day, she found herself distracted. Every time her phone buzzed, she snatched it up, hoping it was Brandon-only to feel disappointed when it wasn't.

By the end of the workday, she finally mustered the courage to send a message.

Valarie: [What are you up to?]

She waited over an hour. No reply.

Her frown deepened, irritation bubbling up inside her. She had already reached out, yet he was still ignoring her.

But remembering that she was in the wrong, she forced herself to calm down. Instead of waiting, she decided to go to the Sumners' in person.

An hour later, she pulled up outside Brandon's house and sat in her car, debating whether to ring the doorbell.

Before she could decide, a maid spotted her and hurried over. "Ms. Weir, are you here to see Mr. Sumner?"

Valarie smiled and got out of the car. "Yes. Is he home?"

"He is. Let me take you inside," the maid replied.

"Thank you," she said.

The maid led her to Brandon's study. After knocking on the door, she announced, "Mr. Sumner, Ms. Weir is here."

Footsteps sounded from inside. A moment later, the door swung open.

Brandon's expression was unreadable. "Come in."

Valarie stepped inside and closed the door behind her. "I came to apologize."

Brandon didn't respond. He simply turned to the bookshelf, picked up a book, and flipped through it as if he hadn't heard her.

Valarie bit her lip and continued, "I was wrong to meet Stefan without telling you. I didn't consider your feelings. I've thought about it, and it won't happen again. I hope you can forgive me."

Brandon turned to face her. "Valarie, do you really think you were wrong?"

Her expression hardened. "If I didn't, I wouldn't have texted you or come here to apologize. What do you want me to do, Brandon?"

She had lowered herself. She didn't understand why he was still questioning her.

"I see. So just because you said sorry, I'm supposed to forget everything? Like my feelings don't matter?" Brandon retorted.

"I never said that. Don't twist my words," Valarie shot back.

Brandon held her gaze. "Valarie,

you've never treated me as an equal. You think just because I chased after you for five years before you agreed to be with me, I should tolerate everything you do, no matter how it makes me feel?"

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Valarie froze, staring in disbelief. "You think I don't see us as equals? If that were true, I wouldn't have come here to apologize. I'd be waiting for you to apologize to me instead!"

She had rushed over right after work to make things right, only to be met with suspicion. The injustice of it stung.

"If you really understood you were wrong, you'd accept that my feelings don't just vanish the moment you say 'sorry.' I'm human, not a machine. Your apology doesn't erase everything," Brandon retorted.

"When I met Michelle before without you knowing, but with others around you wanted to break up. Now you've secretly met Stefan and even went to see him after knowing he kidnapped you. What do you take me for? How important is he to you?"

Valarie stepped back at the anger in his voice. "So what now? You won't accept my apology, and you want to break up?"

Brandon took a deep breath, his gaze lowering. "Let's take a few days to cool off. No contact for now."

Valarie nodded. "Fine. Whatever you want. We'll talk when you're ready."

With that, she turned and left.

The door slammed shut, leaving the study in silence.

Brandon sat back at his desk and picked up a document. Unfortunately, he couldn't focus on a single word.

Just then, his phone rang. It was his assistant, Charlie.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Sumner, Mr. Snowden and Mr. Gilmour are at the office. They want to see you," Charlie reported.

A cold glint flashed in Brandon's eyes. "Tell them I'm unavailable. Have them leave."

"They're refusing to go. They said they'll wait at the Sumner Group until you show up," Charlie replied.

Impatience flickered across Brandon's face. "Are the company's security guards just for decoration? Do I need to teach you how to handle this?"

Charlie had been waiting for that order. "Understood, Mr. Sumner. I'll take care of it."

After hanging up, he immediately called security. "Send a few guards to the CEO's office. There are two men here refusing to leave."

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Ten minutes later, Brad and Jayden were escorted out of Sumner Group.

Brad was livid "Brandon is getting

too arrogant. Sure, the Sumner

Group has grown in recent years, but if it weren't for Prospectus

Technology backing him, his

company would've collapsed by now with an attitude like that!"

Jayden turned to him. "Mr. Snowden, we need his help right now. We can't afford to lose our tempers. If he won't meet us at the office, we'll go to his house and wait outside. He has to leave at some point

Brad sighed but nodded. "Alright.. Jayden...appreciate you standing by us. When you're down and out, that's when you see who's truly loyal. My daughter is lucky t@have a friend like you."

The two drove to Brandon's house and waited by the gate.

Hours passed. Night fell. Still, there was no sign of Brandon.

Brad grew restless. "Jayden... what if he left through another exit? What if he's not even home?"

Jayden shook his head. "He's in there. We just have to wait. We don't have any other choice."

"Alright..." Brad relented.

The butler stood before Brandon in the study. "Mr. Sumner, they've been outside

all day. This can't go on. You'll have to face them eventually—especially when you leave for work tomorrow."

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Brandon nodded. "Let them in. Bring them straight to my study."

"Yes, sir," the butler replied.

Five minutes later, Brad and Jayden entered.

Brandon glanced up from his desk. "Take a seat. I have a document to finish."

Brad nodded quickly. "Of course, Mr. Sumner. Take your time."

Only after completing his work did Brandon close the file and walk over. "Mr. Snowden, Mr. Gilmour, what brings you here?"

Brad leaned forward anxiously. "Mr. Sumner, I'm here for my daughter. You and Michelle are friends. I'm begging you please let this go just this once.

"I swear, she'll never appear in front of you or Ms. Weir again!"

Brandon smiled. "Mr. Snowden, your daughter conspired with Stefan to kidnap Valarie. That's a crime. Whether or not we're friends is irrelevant. Do you expect me to go against the justice system?"

"Mr. Sumner, if you could just convince Ms. Weir to issue a letter of leniency, the court would consider it when sentencing. Just for old times' sake—"

Brandon cut him off, his tone indifferent, "Mr. Snowden, I think you misunderstand something. Yes, I used to consider Michelle a friend. But when she plotted against my girlfriend, she made it clear she never saw me as one."

Brad's expression stiffened.

He had only two children-Michelle from his wife and an illegitimate son from his affair with Lily.

Now, both were in jail. If convicted, it would be a devastating blow to the Snowdens and his company.

His health had been deteriorating, and he'd been planning to gradually hand over the company to Michelle. He never imagined she would pull such a reckless stunt at a time like this.

Jayden, who had been silent until now, finally spoke, his tone cold. "Brandon, have you forgotten? Michelle once got injured saving you. And now, you're just going to let her rot in prison?"

Brandon chuckled. "Got injured saving me?"

Jayden's expression darkened. "What's with that reaction? Are you seriously this ungrateful?"

Without answering, Brandon took a document from his desk and

handed it to Jayden. "She

orchestrated the entire thing herself. Her getting injured was her own doing. What does it have to do with me?"

Jayden flipped through the pages, scowling as he read.

He had never imagined Michelle's so-called "heroic rescue" was nothing but a staged act. She had orchestrated the entire incident to make herself look like a selfless savior.

Brandon's voice was firm. "You're in love with Michelle-that's your business, Do whatever you want to vel help her. But I won't forgive the person who tried to harm my girlfriend. If you have nothing else to say, leave. I have work to finish."

Without another glance at them, he returned to his desk and opened another file. Brad and Jayden remained silent for a moment before finally standing and leaving. Outside the Sumner residence...

Brad turned to Jayden. "Jayden, what do we do now? Is there really no way to save Michelle?"

Jayden shook his head. "It's best if you stop interfering. Brandon has made up his mind and won't let her go."

After reading that report, he himself

no longer had any intention of

helping Michelle. No matter how much effort he put in or how well he treated her, he would always come second to Brandon in her heart.

In that case, there was no point in wasting his time on her anymore.

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Waiting for someone who would never reciprocate was exhausting. Jayden was done humbling himself.

Brad froze, staring at Jayden in disbelief. "Jayden, what do you mean? Didn't you say you'd do whatever it takes to get Michelle out?"

"Mr. Snowden, the evidence against her is solid. She instigated Stefan to kidnap Valarie. The only way out of this is if Brandon and Valarie agree to sign a letter of leniency.

"If they refuse, there's nothing I can do. You can't expect me to go up against both the Sumner and Weir Groups just for Michelle."

If Michelle had ever loved him, maybe he would have done it.

But now? He wouldn't waste his time and energy on someone who didn't deserve it.

"Then... what about Michelle?" Brad asked.

"Michelle may not get out, but Stefan turned himself in. That counts as voluntary surrender, so he'll likely get a lighter sentence.

"From what I know, Stefan is studying economics in university. Honestly, does it really matter who inherits the Snowden Group as long as it's one of your own?"

With that, Jayden walked past Brad and left.

Brad stood frozen for a long time before finally turning around and getting into his car. "Take me to the police station."

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Ever since her arrest, Michelle had been certain her father would find a way to get her out. She wasn't afraid.

This wasn't the first time she had made a mistake. In the past, she had done worse, yet her father had always smoothed things over. This time would be no different.

She waited in the interrogation room until, finally, her father arrived.

The moment she saw him, her eyes lit up. "Dad, you're finally here! When can I get out?"

Brad sat down across from her, his face unreadable.

Michelle noticed something was off. Her smile slowly faded. "Is this more complicated than usual? It's fine. I don't mind staying here for a few extra days. Don't worry about me."

Brad remained silent.

A sense of unease crept into Michelle's chest. "Dad, what's wrong? Why aren't you saying anything?"

Taking a deep breath, Brad finally spoke. "You've made too big of a mistake this time. I can't help you."

Michelle stiffened. "What do you mean? Are you saying I'm actually going to be sentenced?"

Brad didn't answer, but his silence told her everything.

Michelle's voice sharpened with anger. "You're really going to sit back and watch me go to prison?"

"If you knew this could happen, you shouldn't have acted so recklessly! Did you really think I could clean up every mess you made?" Brad snapped.

Michelle stared at him, disbelief twisting her features. Her voice turned icy. "If I go to prison, what happens to the company? Do you think your health will hold up until I get out?"

He was the CEO of the Snowden Group. How could he not have the power to fix something as simple as this?

Besides, she hadn't even done anything to Valarie. If anything, she was the one who had gotten hurt when Stefan pulled a knife and threatened her!

After a long pause, Brad finally

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looked at her and said, "I've decided to hand the company over to your brother. He only acted on your orders and since he turned himself in, his sentence will be lighter Don't

worry. I'll leave some money for you. When you get out—"

Michelle shrieked, "What did you just say?! You're giving the company to Stefan?!

Are you insane? He's just a bastard! What right does he have to inherit the company?!

"Mom built this company from the ground up! When she died, you promised it would be mine! How can you just hand it over to that bastard?!"

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Brad's expression darkened. "Michelle, Stefan is your brother. And for the record, when your mother left the company to me, it was just a small business. I was the one who built

it into a publicly traded corporation. You threw away your own future for a man. That's your own fault."

"No! I won't let you give the Snowden Group to Stefan! If you dare, my mother's ghost will haunt you forever!" Michelle screamed.

Her threats didn't faze Brad in the slightest.

He rose to his feet, looking down at her. "You've lost your mind. I'll get you a lawyer, but you'll have to face the consequences of what you did."

With that, he turned and walked away.

Michelle's eyes burned with fury and hatred.

"Dad! Don't go! You can't do this to me! Dad! I know I was wrong! Come back!" she screamed after him.

No matter how much she yelled, Brad never looked back.

Despair crept into her expression as her screams faded.

For the next half-month, Brandon and Valarie didn't contact each other.

It was a standoff, both waiting to see who would cave first.

At the end of the month, Nyla and her family returned from abroad. She called Valarie, saying she had brought her a gift and told her to come pick it up when she had time.

Valarie got the call right after work and drove straight over, not expecting to run into Brandon at the villa's entrance.

They hadn't seen each other in two weeks. The moment she spotted him, her heart skipped a beat, and she instinctively halted.

Just as she was about to greet him, Brandon walked right past her as if she were invisible.

Watching his cold, indifferent back, Valarie pressed her lips together and took a deep breath before following him inside.

By the time she entered the living room, Brandon was already on the couch, chatting with Damon and Nyla.

Nyla spotted her and immediately

called out, "Valarie, come here!"

Brandon just got here as well.

two didn't run into each other

outside?"

Valarie glanced at Brandon. Seeing that he had no intention of answering, she simply nodded. "No, we didn't."

Nyla sensed the tension but didn't press. Smiling, she handed Valarie a jewelry box. "Here, I got you a present. Open it."

Valarie lifted the lid, stunned by the dazzling array of accessories inside. "These... are for me?"

Nyla nodded, "Yeap! We visited several countries. Every time I saw something pretty, I bought two-one for me, one for you. Eventually, it got hard to carry them all, so I bought this jewelry box to keep them. Do you like them?" swnovel

"I love them! Thank you, Nyla!" Valarie exclaimed.

No woman could resist beautiful accessories.

Nyla took her hand. "I have another gift for you upstairs. It's a private one. Come with me."

Valarie blinked. "What kind of gift?"

"You'll see."

Setting down the jewelry box, Valarie followed Nyla to the bedroom.

Nyla pulled a box from her closet

and handed it to her. "I saw this dress

while I was abroad and

immediately thought of you. Try it on and see if it fits."

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Valarie opened the box and found a red V-neck gown inside.

"This is gorgeous!" she exclaimed.

"Try it on," Nyla urged.

"Okay!" Valarie took the dress into the dressing room.

Less than two minutes later, she stepped out. "Nyla, it fits perfectly."

Nyla looked up, her eyes lighting up with admiration.

Dressed in the red gown, Valarie exuded confidence and elegance, like a queen. It was impossible not to be drawn to her.

"I knew my taste wouldn't fail me! This dress was made for you—every curve is accentuated just right. You look absolutely stunning! If I weren't a woman, I'd probably fall for you right now!" Nyla gushed.

Valarie laughed, covering her mouth. "You're exaggerating. But I really do love this dress. Thank you, Nyla!"

"There's no need to thank me. We don't do that between us! Oh, by the way, why don't you go downstairs and let Brandon see it too?" Nyla suggested.

Valarie's smile faded slightly. "Forget it. He probably wouldn't care anyway."

"You two still haven't made up after half a month? Or did you fight again?" Nyla asked.

Valarie pursed her lips and sat on the couch. "I took your advice and went to apologize, but he just mocked me. He said I never really treated him as my equal, and then we started arguing again. He said he needed time to cool off.

"But it's been half a month, and he's still not done. I ran into him at the door just now, and he acted like he didn't even see me. He didn't even say hello."

She lowered her gaze and let out a small, bitter laugh. "If this keeps up, we'll probably just break up naturally."

She had always hated the silent treatment, but Brandon had ignored her for half a month.

At first, she had waited for him to calm down so they could talk properly. But as time dragged on, she realized she didn't care as much anymore. She had grown used to being alone.

If they broke up, it wouldn't be the end of the world.

Nyla frowned. "Maybe he's waiting for you to reach out first. You two can't just stay in this stalemate forever."

"It's fine. Don't worry about it. Just focus on your little one for now. If we're meant to be, things will work out. If not, then that's just how it is," Valarie replied.

She had already come to terms with it. Love wasn't everything. If it worked out, great. If not, she'd survive.

"Alright then," Nyla said, dropping the topic.

They continued chatting upstairs for a while. By the time Valarie changed back into her regular clothes and went downstairs, Brandon had already left.

After saying goodbye to Damon and Nyla, she left as well, carrying the gifts Nyla had given her.

Nyla had wanted her to stay for dinner, but she declined. "You guys just got back from traveling. You must be exhausted. I won't intrude. Let's have dinner another day when you're well-rested."

"Alright," Nyla replied.

Valarie got into her car and drove home.

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As soon as Valarie stepped into the living room, she saw her mother sitting on the couch.

She considered pretending she hadn't seen her, but Phoebe spoke first. "Valarie, come sit down. I have something to talk to you about."

Valarie tried to avoid the conversation. "Mom, I had a long day at work. Can we talk tomorrow?"

"No, it has to be today," Phoebe insisted.

Valarie frowned but walked over and sat across from her.

"How are things with Brandon? Has he mentioned marriage yet?" Phoebe asked.

Every few days, her mother would bring up the same topic.

Valarie was beyond tired of hearing it. "Mom, I've told you already. We're not planning on getting married yet."

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Phoebe scowled. "Not planning yet? You're over 30 now. Nyla is already on her second child, and you still don't know when you're getting married?"

Valarie stayed silent.

Phoebe's frustration deepened. "You're already this old, and your father and I still have to worry about your marriage. When will you finally settle down?"

"Even if I wanted to get married, it's not something I can decide on my own! Why do you always put the blame on me?" Valarie grumbled.

With how things were going between her and Brandon, marriage wasn't even on the table-breaking up seemed more likely.

Phoebe narrowed her eyes. "So it's Brandon who doesn't want to get married? I told you not to date someone younger, but you wouldn't listen. Now look, you don't even know if or when he'll propose!"

Valarie had had enough. "Marriage, marriage, marriage! That's all you talk about! If you keep pushing me, I'll move out tomorrow."

"You" Phoebe choked on her anger.

Not giving her mother a chance to argue, Valarie turned and walked away.

Back in her room, she took a deep breath, forcing down the emotions swirling inside her.

She pulled out her phone and opened her chat with Brandon. After a moment of hesitation, she typed a message.

Valarie: [When are you free? We need to talk.]

She waited over ten minutes before he finally replied.

Brandon: [I have a few business deals to take care of. I don't have time right now.]

Valarie frowned and tossed her phone aside, frustrated.

It had been half a month, and he was clearly still angry.

After a while, she picked up her phone again and sent another message.

Valarie: [Brandon, how long do you plan on staying mad? At least give me a time frame. I don't want to keep waiting indefinitely.]

This time, he didn't reply at all.

...

The next morning, Valarie went straight to the Sumner Group to find him.

Sitting in his office, she got straight to the point. "I came today to ask how you plan to resolve things between us. Half a month should be enough time to cool down, don't you think?"

"Valarie, I have a meeting soon. I only have ten minutes," Brandon said.

Valarie nodded. "Alright, I'll keep it brief. I want to apologize again for what happened before. I didn't consider your feelings, and I hope you can forgive me."

She looked up at him, waiting for a response.

She had already made up her mind

before coming. If Brandon still refused to meet her halfway, she would end things. Better to rip off the bandage than drag this out indefinitely.

Brandon lowered his gaze, silent for a moment before finally saying, "I really do have a meeting. I'll cancel my dinner plans tonight. Let's have dinner and talk, okay?"

Valarie let out a dry chuckle. "So if I hadn't come looking for you, you wouldn't have canceled your dinner plans? Brandon, are you actually too busy to see me, or do you just not want to?"

Before he could respond, she stood and walked toward the door.

Just as she reached it, footsteps sounded behind her. Before she could turn, she was pulled into a tight embrace.

Valarie stiffened. A second later, she shoved him away. "Brandon, what the hell do you mean by this?"