

Knocked Up by the CEO/

Chapter 2

They walked together to Dr. Harrison's office. Marshall held her hand as the doctor reviewed her test results.

"The test came back positive," Dr. Harrison said gently. "I'm afraid it's a rare form of degenerative neurological condition. Very aggressive."

Eleanor inhaled slowly, steadying herself. "How long do I have?"

"Mom!" Marshall cut in, his voice sharp with panic. "You're not dying." He turned to the doctor. "She's not dying, right?"

Dr. Harrison's eyes didn't waver. "I'm sorry, Mr. Valor..."

"What are you sorry about?" Marshall snapped. "Just say she's not dying. Just say that."

Dr. Harrison's voice dropped lower. "Based on the progression, I'd estimate she is approximately one year old. Maybe a little more, maybe less."

Marshall stared like he had spoken a language he couldn't translate. "A year," he repeated. "One year?"

Eleanor squeezed his hand, tears in her eyes. "I thought it was just stress. Didn't think it was death knocking."

"I'm really sorry, Mrs. Valor. Mr. Valor," Dr. Harrison said, "We caught it late. The most we can do now is manage symptoms and keep her stress levels low. Make sure she's comfortable."

"There has to be something else," Marshall said quickly. "A trial, some treatment. I'll pay anything. Money is not an issue. She just can't die."

"I've consulted with my colleagues across the country. This particular condition. It's incredibly rare. There's research being done, but nothing that would help your mother in time."

Marshall stared at his hands, trying to process the impossible. His mother, the strongest woman he knew, had one year left.

Eleanor looked between her son and the doctor. “So I wouldn’t even get to see my dreams come true.”

Dr. Harrison’s expression softened. “What dreams, if you don’t mind me asking?”

She gave a half-smile, soft and bitter all at once. “I’ve had it all. Power. Wealth. Everything people spend their lives chasing. I’ve been blessed, but my son...” her eyes moved to Marshall “... my brilliant, stubborn son has given me everything but the one thing I’ve wanted most.”

“Mom, please. Not now,” Marshall muttered.

“No, Marshall. Let me speak.”

She dabbed her eyes with the edge of her silk scarf. “I’ve always dreamed of the day I’d be a grandmother. Even just once. To hold those tiny hands...those tiny feet. To watch them grow. To know your father and I didn’t just build a legacy. We built a family.”

She paused. “I’ve lived a full life. Truly. But the one thing I’ve never been able to earn, no matter how much I gave or built, is the right to be called ‘Nana.’” She looked at him again. “And I don’t have time to wait anymore.”

She stood up slowly and left the office. She didn’t look back. She was completely broken.

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Kimberly finally got to Valor Groups, her heart pounding with hope. But the moment she got to the front desk, she was met with bad news.

“I’m sorry, but your name has been called,” the receptionist said. “When there was no response, we moved to the next candidate.”

Kimberly’s heart dropped into her stomach. “Please, I can explain. My son is in the hospital and there was an emergency this morning. I just need five minutes with whoever is doing the interviews.”

The receptionist's expression didn't soften. "Ma'am, I understand that life happens, but Valor Groups follow strict procedures. Being nearly an hour late says a lot about work ethics and reliability. The position has been filled."

"Filled?" The word came out in a whisper. "But I just... I need this job. My son needs surgery and I..."

"I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do. You can reapply for future openings, but today's opportunity is gone."

Kimberly stood there feeling like the ground was shifting beneath her. The receptionist had already turned back to her computer, dismissing her completely.

Who was she kidding? Kimberly thought as she walked numbly to the elevator. Are things getting better? Miracles? What a joke

She pressed the down button and stared at her reflection at the polished steel door. Even if miracle existed, which clearly didn't, she definitely wasn't going to be on the receiving end of one. She had never been.

Abandoned by her parents. Losing her fiancé. Betrayed by her best friend. The only good thing life has ever given her, needed her help and she couldn't even show up on time to save him.

"You're pathetic," she told herself as she stepped into the elevator. Completely useless. A disaster. She kept calling herself every bad word she could find in her head.

The elevator doors closed, and she leaned against the wall, feeling the weight of every failure crushing down on her. She was so lost in her spiral of self-hatred that she didn't even notice when someone else stepped in.

The elevator jerked suddenly, a hard shake that snapped her back to reality. Her documents slipped from her hands and from the stranger's too.

They crouched together, gathering the scattered papers. Then the stranger called maintenance from the emergency button and within minutes the elevator started moving again.

Instead of going back to her son's room when she got to the hospital, Kimberly found herself climbing the rooftop. It was a quiet place she had discovered. She sat

on the bench overlooking the city and finally let herself fall apart. The tears came in waves, each one dragging out her desperation, her fear, her complete and utter hopelessness.

“I can’t do this anymore,” she sobbed into her hands. “I can’t save him. I can’t save us.”

“You know you’re not the only one with problems, right?”

The voice startled her. She looked up through her tears to see the same man she bumped into earlier. He was standing a few feet away.

She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand quickly. “I’m sorry,” she said, starting to stand. “I’ll leave.”

But he held up his hand and his expression softened completely. “No, I’m sorry,” he said, and she could hear the genuine regret in his voice. “I shouldn’t have spoken to you like that. That was insensitive and cruel.”

She stared at him in surprise. When was the last time anyone apologized to her for anything?

He gestured to the bench. “You don’t have to leave. I’ll go.”

As he turned to walk away, Kimberly found herself curious despite her pain. What problems could someone like him possibly have? He was obviously wealthy, successful, powerful. His biggest worry was probably which luxury car to drive that day.

But something in his eyes when he had apologized looked... haunted. Like he was carrying his own invisible weight.

She watched him disappear, then sat back down, feeling strangely less alone than she had moments before.