

Trading My Ex for His Uncle (Nyla)

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Early the next morning, Nyla woke up naturally.

As she sat up and prepared to get out of bed, she noticed something unusual on her bedside table-a black card.

Damon must have left it the night before.

Nyla washed up and went downstairs with the card in hand. She had planned to return it to Damon, but he had already left for the office, so she set it aside for now. After breakfast, Nyla called Valarie and invited her to go shopping. Valarie mentioned she had something important to discuss, and they agreed to meet at the mall. Nyla arrived first and browsed for a while before Valarie showed up.

"Valarie, you said you had something to tell me?" she asked.

Valarie nodded and linked her arm with Nyla's as they walked into a store. "Yes, I'm getting engaged to Zayn at the end of the month. Remember to come to our engagement party." Nyla was caught off guard and frowned slightly. "Why so suddenly? Is it because of the Weir Group?"

"It's partly due to that, but also because I'm at that age. Zayn is a pretty decent choice, so I decided to go ahead with it," Valarie replied.

Seeing Valarie's calm expression, Nyla felt a pang of worry. It was as if Valarie were discussing something completely unrelated to herself, without any excitement or happiness. "Marriage is a lifetime commitment. It's not something you should rush into just because of age or because he seems like a good fit. Are you sure you've thought this through?" Nyla asked.

Ordinary people already faced social pressure regarding divorce, let alone someone from families in high society like the Weirs and Updikes.

Valarie remained silent, so Nyla continued. "You've only known Zayn for a short time, and you don't know him that well yet. He might be interested in you because of the Weir

Group. Valarie, don't rush into something just because of pressure." Valarie smiled bitterly. "I understand what you're saying. But if I don't marry Zayn, it'll just be another person, another Wayne, Blaine, or Kane. I'd never have full control over my own marriage."

"That doesn't mean you should just jump into it without careful thought, Once you're in

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that kind of marriage, it's not something you can easily get out of," Nyla cautioned.

"I know you mean well, Nyla, but my mind is made up. Please don't try to talk me out of it," Valarie said.

Seeing Valarie's resolve, Nyla frowned but remained silent. After all, this was Valarie's personal decision-she could advise her but couldn't make the choice for her.

She just worried that Valarie marrying Zayn might not help the Weir Group and could even give Zayn a way to seize control of it.

Noticing the concern in Nyla's eyes, Valarie patted her hand with a smile. "Alright, enough about me. Today, we're here to find outfits and get styled up to look amazing for the party." Nyla pushed aside her concerns and nodded. "Alright."

"Oh, one more thing-you might not know this, but the star of the party tonight is the grandfather of Gabriel's wife, so we might run into him there," Valarie reminded her. Nyla's steps faltered as memories of Gabriel's actions from five years ago rushed back, sending a chill down her spine.

"Got it," she replied.

Seeing Nyla's face pale slightly, Valarie quickly added, "Don't worry too much. Gabriel has been married for a few years now and has a child. He probably won't bother you anymore." Nyla nodded. "I think so too."

They walked into a luxury boutique store, and a sales associate greeted them with a smile.

"Ms. Weir, Ms. Kinsey, you came at the perfect time! We just received some new pieces, and they're all limited edition. Let me show them to you," the sales associate said.

"Sure," Nyla and Valarie replied in unison.

In the center of the store hung several stunning dresses.

Right away, Nyla's eyes were drawn to a mermaid gown in the middle. The gown was covered in metallic sequins, shifting in color from white to light blue to deep blue. It captured the beautiful gradients of the ocean, both dreamy and mesmerizing.

Noticing her gaze, the associate spoke excitedly. "Ms. Kinsey, you have an excellent eye! This dress is the latest work by Ris, titled Deep Sea. There are only five of these in the world. Many customers love it, but the waistline is quite small, so few can wear it. Would you like to try it on?"

"Yes, please," Nyla replied.

The associate quickly took the dress down and led Nyla to the fitting room.

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Valarie, with her own collection of formal dresses, didn't see anything that caught her eye right away, so she sat down to wait.

Just then, a sweet voice echoed. "Valarie! Fancy running into you here! Are you shopping for clothes too?"

Valarie turned to see Gigi Chesney and felt her mood sink.

Gigi had been chasing after Brandon ever since he started pursuing Valarie.

Valarie had once been on good terms with Gigi, but when Gigi found out that Brandon liked Valarie, they had a falling out. Since then, Gigi had deliberately made things difficult for her multiple times during partnerships between their family businesses. Valarie picked up a magazine and flipped through it, clearly uninterested in engaging with Gigi. It was as if Gigi were oblivious to this as she sat across from her.

"Oh, I heard you're getting engaged to Zayn. Congratulations are in order!" Gigi's voice held a mocking edge. With Valarie and Zayn engaged, she felt she might finally have a shot with Brandon.

Valarie glanced up with a disinterested look. "Didn't you get the hint? I don't want to talk to you. Just like old times, throwing yourself into unwelcome situations."

Gigi let out a sarcastic laugh. "Valarie, with the Weirs on the brink, where do you get off talking to me like that?"

"Aren't you the one who approached me? If you don't want to hear what I have to say, don't come here looking for trouble," Valarie retorted.

"You!" Gigi's face flushed with anger as she pointed a trembling finger at Valarie.

She quickly regained her composure and sneered. "Keep acting tough. We'll see how long that lasts."

At that moment, the fitting room curtain opened, and both Valarie and Gigi turned their heads. The moment they saw Nyla, they were stunned.

Nyla stepped out in the strapless mermaid gown. Her long, wavy hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her lips were a vivid red against her fair skin.

She was breathtaking-a beauty one couldn't look away from.

The sequins on the dress shimmered as she walked, giving her the ethereal look of a mermaid basking in the sun. The sight of her was a blend of elegance and sensuality.

Valarie snapped out of it first and let out a low whistle. Nyla would undoubtedly be the center of attention in this dress at the party.

"Nyla, it's like the dress was made just for you!" Valarie gushed.

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Nyla smiled and spun around in the dress. The fishtail hem swayed elegantly with her movement, the sequins glimmering under the light.

"Really? I love it too," she replied.

The sales associate adjusted the dress' hem from behind and chimed in. "Absolutely, Ms. Kinsey! You're actually the first person who's been able to fit into this dress perfectly!" Her admiring gaze drifted to Nyla's slim waist, and she wished she could have a figure like

that.

Meanwhile, Gigi's jealousy flashed briefly in her eyes as she looked at Nyla, who practically glowed in the dress.

Still, she remembered that Damon was Brandon's uncle. If things progressed between her and Brandon, she might one day need to call Nyla "Aunt Nyla".

Deciding to hold back any bitterness, Gigi praised, "You look stunning-absolutely like a goddess!"

Valarie turned to Gigi with a scoff. "Didn't think you could actually say something nice for once."

Gigi's face darkened with irritation. "Valarie, don't push it!"

"Didn't you come over here on your own?" Valarie retorted.

Knowing Nyla was present, Gigi managed to keep her anger in check. "I don't have time for this. I need to go."

With that, she turned and left quickly.

Watching Gigi leave, Valarie rolled her eyes, thinking Gigi was being ridiculous.

Nyla gathered the hem of her dress and walked over to Valarie, asking, "Who was that woman? You seem to have a history."

Valarie waved it off. "Not worth mentioning."

Seeing Valarie's darkened expression, Nyla dropped the subject.

After buying the dress, Nyla chose a pair of matching heels before heading with Valarie to get their hair done.

It was nearly 5:00 p.m. by the time they finished. Just as Nyla was about to head home, her phone rang-it was Damon, asking where she was and telling her to wait for him. Valarie had to head home to change, so she left first.

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Nyla waited for about half an hour until Damon finally arrived,

This sleek black Maybach pulled up to the curb, and the back door opened. He stepped out, dressed in a gray suit that highlighted his tall, refined figure. He exuded an elegant yet commanding aura as he walked toward her, turning several heads along the way,

Nyla picked up her bag and walked out of the store. She had taken only a few steps when his gaze landed on her.

Damon's gaze paused, and his pace quickened as he approached, though his movements remained calm and poised.

Finally, he stopped right in front of her.

Maybe it was her imagination, but she felt that his gaze was even more intense than usual. It was as if a flame flickered in his dark eyes, almost as if he wanted to consume her. 1

Nyla clenched the handle of her bag, feeling her cheeks heat up. "Do I have something on my face? Why are you staring at me like that?"

"No, you just look beautiful today," Damon said, his eyes filled with warmth.

Nyla's hair was loose, with a blue diamond hairpin pinning one side back, exposing her delicate profile. She looked breathtaking.

Suddenly, Damon's gaze shifted to the necklace around her neck. He commented, "This necklace doesn't quite match."

Nyla raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Really? Both Valarie and the stylist thought it looked great."

"It is beautiful-just not enough," Damon replied.

"Well, it's too late to find a better one now," Nyla said with a shrug.

Without answering, Damon took out his phone and called Spencer. "Bring the Heart of the Sea that I bid for last week. Meet me at the Wilkie residence with it."

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Nyla looked at Damon in surprise and asked, "You went to an auction last week?"

"A client of mine has a thing for antique auctions. There happened to be one in the city, so I attended with them to show goodwill. I saw a necklace I liked and thought I'd save it for your birthday," Damon explained. "Then why are you giving it to me in advance?" she asked.

"I'm going to give it to you anyway. Giving it to you now is the same," he replied.

Nyla felt a wave of warmth, and her smile widened, revealing her dimples. "Thank Damon.'

you,

Damon raised an eyebrow, wrapping an arm around her waist. His tone was teasing. "Just a verbal thank you?"

Nyla's face flushed as she asked, "How else would you want me to thank you?"

Damon's gaze shifted to her lips, his voice dropping suggestively. "By mouth works."

"Huh?" She looked up, only to find Damon's face suddenly closer. Before she knew it, his lips were on hers.

Nyla's eyes widened, her hands gripping his jacket. She felt a jolt of electricity run through her body, making her freeze.

Realizing they were standing in front of a busy mall, she quickly pushed him away. Her face burned with embarrassment as she noticed people glancing their way.

Seeing her shy reaction, Damon smiled and said, "That will count as my thank-you."

Nyla glared at him, then lifted her dress and hurried to the car parked by the curb.

Damon couldn't help chuckling as he watched her make her escape, following her into the

car.

Neither of them noticed someone taking photos of them.

Half an hour later, they arrived at the Wilkie residence.

Spencer was already waiting by the entrance. As soon as he saw Damon's car pull up, he approached. "Mr. Sumner, here's the Heart of the Sea." Damon took the dark blue jewelry box from him with a light hum. "Thank you. You can head back now."

After Spencer left, Damon handed the jewelry box to Nyla, his voice soft. "See if you like it."

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Nyla opened it, revealing a stunning sapphire necklace.

The sapphire, cut in the shape of a seashell, was surrounded by tiny diamonds that enhanced its beauty and gave it a brilliant, radiant allure.

"It's gorgeous!" Nyla gasped. She had thought her current necklace was already impressive, but it paled in comparison to this one.

Seeing her joy, Damon smiled. "Let me put it on for you."

"Alright," she said with a nod.

He carefully removed her original necklace and clasped the Heart of the Sea around her neck.

Nyla asked, "How does it look?"

Damon stared at her for a few seconds, his voice a bit hoarse when he answered, "Beautiful."

Meeting Damon's passionate gaze, Nyla felt her heart skip a beat. Instinctively, she reached for the car door, intending to step out.

Unfortunately, Damon moved faster. Just as she turned, he wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her back to him. His lips claimed hers in a deep kiss that left her nearly breathless. When he finally pulled away, his lips lingered near hers, and the car's atmosphere grew heavy with tension.

Nyla's face flushed as she caught her breath, managing to find her voice. "Damon, if you keep this up, we're going to be late to the party."

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Damon tightened his grip around Nyla's waist before releasing her, gently smoothing her slightly tousled hair as he said in a low voice, "Let's go."

They got out of the car, and Nyla slipped her arm through Damon's as they walked in together.

At the entrance, Gabriel and Jane welcomed guests, catching sight of Damon and Nyla approaching from a distance.

Nyla wore a blue gradient strapless gown, her long hair cascading like a waterfall down her back. She resembled a mermaid gliding through the deep sea—a sight so stunning that it was hard to look away.

Next to her, Damon stood tall and sharp-featured in a charcoal-gray suit, though his face was devoid of warmth. He radiated an unapproachable air.

The two walked together like a perfect match, making everything around them feel like a mere backdrop.

Unaware of Nyla and Gabriel's history, Jane greeted Damon and Nyla warmly, "Mr. Sumner, Ms. Kinsey, welcome to my grandfather's birthday celebration."

Damon's driver stepped forward to hand over their gift, which Jane's maid quickly accepted, passing it along to an attendant for recording.

Since Nyla had arrived, Gabriel's gaze had not left her. His stare was unreserved and direct, as though he did not mind if Jane or Damon noticed. Damon's face registered mild displeasure as he took a step forward, positioning himself in front of Nyla to block Gabriel's view.

"Mr. Hackett, isn't it a little inappropriate to stare at my girlfriend like that?" he asked.

Gabriel pulled his gaze away, offering a gentle smile. "My apologies, Mr. Sumner. I didn't mean anything by it. It's just that your date bears a striking resemblance to my sister, who fell into the sea five years ago. If I recall correctly, you were pursuing her back then, weren't you?"

Damon simply smiled, not addressing the implication, and turned to Jane. "Ms. Wilkie, we'll head inside."

With a flawlessly polite smile, Jane replied, "Please do. I hope you both enjoy the evening and forgive any lack of attention on my part."

After Damon and Nyla walked inside, Jane turned to Gabriel with a slight frown.
"Gabriel, I never knew you had a sister."

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"Stepsister," he replied coolly.

Jane was about to ask more when another guest arrived, so she set her curiosity aside to greet them. The continuous stream of guests kept her busy, leaving her with no chance to inquire further.

Meanwhile, Damon and Nyla entered the garden, already bustling with prominent figures and elites from Saintornia.

Although the Wilkies had only moved to Saintornia five years prior, their company had already gone public, earning them many connections. With the recent growth of the Wilkie Group, many were eager to curry favor with them. Naturally, the garden buzzed with a lively crowd.

Damon and Nyla quickly drew attention with their entrance. It was uncommon for Damon to bring a date to events, let alone someone he seemed so close to.

Soon, whispers of curiosity quickly spread.

"Who's that woman with Mr. Sumner? She's stunning! But I don't think I've seen her before."

"She looks familiar... Oh, wait, isn't she the spitting image of Damon's niece-in-law, who fell into the ocean five years ago?"

"What? Are you thinking what I'm thinking? This feels like a scandal waiting to happen—an uncle and his niece-in-law?"

"But didn't she die five years ago? This woman must be a stand-in he found to replace her!"

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Despite the murmurs, no one dared approach Damon or Nyla directly to ask about them, choosing instead to discuss and steal admiring glances from afar. After all, Damon had not been close to any woman in the past five years. The fiancée he had had was essentially a one-sided affair, and their engagement had been called off not long ago.

Nyla's calm and graceful demeanor, despite the glances and attention directed her way, only enhanced her appeal.

Damon guided her toward Pedro to offer their birthday wishes. Afterward, as they turned to leave, they ran into Nathaniel and Rebecca.

When Nyla saw Nathaniel, she paused, surprised by how much he had changed in five years -he looked like a completely different person, his formerly vibrant energy now nowhere to be found.

As they passed, a chilling aura surrounded him, causing Nyla to shiver involuntarily.

Neither Nathaniel nor Rebecca acknowledged them, and Damon seemed equally indifferent, treating them as if they weren't there.

Nyla glanced up at Damon, noting his tense expression and clenched jaw. She tightened her hold on his arm.

"Damon, you and Nathaniel..." she probed gently.

"We're no longer friends," he replied, his voice icy.

Nyla hesitated, biting her lip, but eventually sighed and said nothing more.

Soon after, Valarie entered with Zayn. Noticing Nyla, she whispered something to Zayn before lifting her dress to approach her.

Nyla let go of Damon's arm, saying, "Valarie's coming over. You should go handle your business."

For a businessman like Damon, this birthday celebration was more than just a party-it was also an opportunity for business. In fact, many guests had already approached him with proposals, but he had turned them down, likely because Nyla was by his side. He raised an eyebrow. "Now that Valarie's here, you're abandoning me?"

Nyla feigned a haughty look and replied, "I don't want to interrupt your business talks."

Damon's smile deepened. "Then should I thank you for being so considerate?"

"Not necessary," she said, fully aware of what he meant.

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"Well, if you need anything, just come find me, Damon reminded her.

"Sure," Nyla answered.

Just as he left, Valarie reached Nyla's side and noticed the necklace she was wearing.

"Nyla, this necklace is beautiful! When did you change it?" she asked, recalling that Nyla had worn a different one the last time they had met.

Nyla instinctively touched the necklace, a warm smile spreading across her face and her cheeks slightly flushed. She answered, "Damon gave it to me. He thought it suited the dress better.

Valarie couldn't help but admire it. "It does. Damon has quite an eye for detail."

The necklace highlighted Nyla's already fair complexion and looked exquisite against her slender neck. They were both captivating.

As Nyla and Valarie chatted, there was a sudden stir at the entrance. They turned to see Gigi entering arm-in-arm with Brandon.

Gigi wore a pink, voluminous gown, her makeup flawless, while Brandon looked dashing in a white suit. The two appeared perfectly matched. Today's Bonus Offer

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Valarie glanced over with a blank expression, then quickly looked away.

Nyla turned to Valarie, unable to suppress her concern. "Valarie, maybe you should think over this engagement a bit more." Spending a lifetime with someone she didn't love would be painful-like reliving the same unfulfilling day over and over. Valarie managed a faint smile. "Nyla, you don't have to worry about me. I know what I'm doing."

Seeing her stubborn expression, Nyla bit her lip. She wanted to tell Valarie about Damon's plan to help the Weirs but hesitated, fearing that Damon might change his

mind and leave Valarie disappointed. With a quiet sigh, she decided to find a moment to ask Damon about it that evening.

"Nyla, I'd like to be alone for a while, so I'll leave you here," Valarie said, excusing herself.

"Alright, but don't wander off too far. The event will be starting soon," Nyla reminded her.

Valarie nodded and quickly walked away.

As she left, Nyla felt suddenly at a loss.

After marrying Clark, she rarely attended gatherings like this, so she didn't know many people and had no desire to try to fit into this circle. She picked up a glass of juice, planning to find a quiet corner. As she passed the champagne tower, a maid rushed forward and collided with her, knocking her into the champagne tower.

The entire tower of champagne glasses shattered, sending shards and champagne spilling everywhere and drawing everyone's attention.

Nyla pitched forward toward the broken glass on the floor. Her face paled as she realized what was about to happen, and her eyes filled with fear. Instinctively, she reached out to grab the tablecloth but found nothing to hold onto.

From across the room, Damon's expression darkened upon seeing what was happening. He began running toward her, but he was too far away. Just when Nyla thought she was about to be seriously injured, a strong hand grabbed her arm and pulled her upright.

Once steady, she took a deep breath and turned to thank her rescuer. To her surprise, it was Gabriel

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She bit her lip and took a step back, putting distance between them. "Thank you, Mr. Hackett."

Seeing her wary response, Gabriel narrowed his eyes slightly, still smiling.

"No need to thank me. It was our maid who bumped into you. I owe you an apology, Ms. Kinsey," he said.

Just then, Damon arrived at Nyla's side.

Seeing that she was unharmed but still a bit pale, he heaved in relief, pulled her behind him protectively, and turned to Gabriel. "Thank you, Mr. Hackett." Gabriel's expression remained friendly. "No need to mention it, Mr. Sumner."

Damon's gaze fell on the maid, whose face had gone pale as she looked down at the floor.

"I'm so sorry, Ms. Kinsey. I didn't mean to! You suddenly walked out from the side, and I didn't see you..." the maid apologized, her voice trembling. Damon's expression turned icy as he questioned, "So you're saying it was my girlfriend's fault?"

The maid trembled in fear and lowered her head. "No, that's not what I meant... It was my fault. Ms. Kinsey, I'm really sorry..."

Before Nyla could interject, Gabriel spoke coldly. "Go to the butler to collect this month's wages. Starting tomorrow, you will no longer work here."

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The maid, Pauline Gundy, went pale and dropped to her knees abruptly. "Mr. Hackett, I have elderly parents and a daughter in university. My husband passed away in a car accident a few years ago. Without this job, my family will have no income. Please, have mercy on me!"

Tears streamed down her face as her whole body shook with fear.

Gabriel's expression remained cold and silent.

Pauline's eyes darted toward Nyla, and she pleaded tearfully, "Ms. Kinsey, please, have mercy on me. I can't afford to lose this job. I beg you!"

Before Nyla could respond, nearby guests began murmuring.

"She seems so pitiful. Maybe they should let it slide this time."

"It's difficult for a woman to be the sole breadwinner for her entire family. Everyone makes mistakes. We should be forgiving."

"It wasn't intentional. If they keep pressing the issue, it just makes them seem petty."

Nyla's face turned frosty. It was easy for the crowd to act self-righteous-they weren't the ones who had nearly fallen onto broken glass.

She looked down at the kneeling Pauline and said firmly, "This is my first time attending an event at the Wilkies'. How did you know my last name?"

Pauline's face flashed with panic, but she quickly replied, "Ms. Wilkie instructed us to memorize all the guests' names and faces. You're so striking, Ms. Kinsey-I couldn't forget you." Nyla remained unmoved. Her face showed no emotion. "Is that so?"

Pauline forced a nod. "Yes... Ms. Kinsey, please, I'm willing to do anything to make amends -just don't take my job away."

Nyla nodded. "Alright."

Pauline's face lit up with hope, but Nyla continued, pointing to a woman in a white dress nearby. "If you can tell me that young woman's full name, I'll consider forgiving you." "W-What?" Pauline's face turned deathly pale, and she froze.

Nyla's expression grew colder as Pauline stammered, unable to answer. "What's wrong? You don't know?"

Pauline gritted her teeth. "I... I forgot..."

"But didn't you say you had memorized all the guests' names and faces?" Nyla questioned.

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Her voice wasn't loud, but it was firm. The guests around them quickly realized the truth: this maid had been sent deliberately to bump into Nyla. Expressions shifted upon this realization. They had taken the maid's side earlier out of a sense of superiority and feigned magnanimity.

Now, realizing they had been manipulated into sympathizing with someone who had ulterior motives, their expressions turned harsh and disdainful. "Ms. Kinsey, this maid's a liar-absolutely no sympathy for people like her. You should call the police!"

"Yes, absolutely. The police can uncover who put her up to this!"

"Someone who'd target a guest at an event should be arrested!"

Pauline trembled as she heard the angry voices around her. She was sweating profusely and looked as if she wished she could vanish. "Ms. Kinsey, no one told me to do it... I swear it was an accident! Please, just let me leave now, and I'll never come back," she begged. She tried to make a run for it, but a cold voice stopped her. "Stay right there!"

Gabriel glared at her. "Who sent you? If you don't answer, I'll have you escorted straight to the police station."

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Pauline turned pale and collapsed to her knees under Gabriel's intense, chilling gaze. She knew what he was capable of, but implicating Jane would make her fate even worse.

Resolving herself, she said firmly, "Mr. Hackett, no one told me to do it. If you don't believe me, call the police. I swear it was an accident!"

Her words hung in the air as the room fell silent.

Just then, a gentle female voice broke the tension. "Gabriel, what's going on? Why is everyone gathered here?"

Everyone turned to see Jane approaching with a soft smile.

When she noticed who was on the floor, she appeared surprised. "Pauline, what are you doing here?"

A flicker crossed Pauline's eyes before she quickly lowered her head. "Ms. Wilkie, I accidentally bumped into Ms. Kinsey. She thinks someone put me up to it and now wants me to name the person... I swear, I'm innocent..."

Jane frowned slightly and looked at Gabriel. "Gabriel, you know Pauline's character. She wouldn't hurt a fly. This must be some kind of misunderstanding."

Gabriel's expression remained cold. "Regardless, she caused a disturbance at Grandpa's birthday party. She needs to explain herself."

Jane nodded and, with a sigh, turned to Nyla. "Ms. Kinsey, the party is about to start, and your dress has champagne on it. Let me take you upstairs to change. Once the party is over, we'll address this however you see fit. The Wilkies won't object." Nyla thought for a moment and then smiled slightly. "Alright, I'll follow your lead, Ms. Wilkie."

She had guessed who was behind this the moment Jane showed up. Exposing Jane here wouldn't be worth it-she wanted to see what else Jane had in mind.

"Please, follow me, Ms. Kinsey," Jane invited,

As Nyla prepared to leave, a hand suddenly gripped her wrist.

Damon leaned close and whispered, "If anything feels off, call me immediately."

Nyla smiled softly. "I will."

She knew Jane wouldn't dare pull anything too drastic in front of so many guests.

As they left, Gabriel instructed that Pauline be confined for the time being, then reassured the guests, "Sorry for the disturbance. Please continue to enjoy yourselves. Apologies if

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anything was amiss."

The guests soon resumed the celebration as if nothing had happened.

In another part of the house...

Jane led Nyla to her personal dressing room and gestured to a wardrobe. "Ms. Kinsey, these dresses are all new. Please choose one that you like."

Nyla glanced at the options, noting they were all outdated, with designs from several seasons ago. She raised a brow, suddenly realizing the reason behind Jane's plot. It seemed she had dressed too well and had taken Jane's limelight. Nyla picked out a long white dress anyway and said, "Ms. Wilkie, I'll take this one."

"Great, Ms. Kinsey. I'll wait outside while you change," Jane replied.

"No need. I don't mind you being here. Besides, if anything goes missing while you're not here, it'll be hard for me to explain myself," Nyla hinted.

Jane's smile froze, not expecting Nyla to be so direct.

"Ms. Kinsey, I trust you," she said and turned to leave.

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Once alone, Nyla quickly changed into the white dress, though it was a bit loose around her waist. She took a safety pin from her purse to cinch it. Then, picking up her original dress, she left the dressing room.

When Jane saw Nyla in the white gown, her smile faltered even more. 'If Nyla had resembled a mermaid in the ocean earlier, she now looked as ethereal and untouchable as moonlight, her beauty strikingly cold and pure Jane clenched and unclenched her hands before praising, "Ms. Kinsey, you really do look beautiful in anything. This dress suits you well!"

Not missing the flash of envy in Jane's eyes, Nyla smirked. "Really?" I have you to thank, Ms. Wilkie. I appreciate the loan."

"You're welcome. Let's head back down," Jane replied.

As they walked back to the main hall, guests took in the contrast between Jane's bold red gown and Nyla's elegant white one. In comparison, Jane's dress now seemed gaudy, almost overdone, while Nyla shone with understated elegance. Jane's smile strained even further as she noticed the lingering looks. She excused herself, Ms. Kinsey, I'll leave you now. I have things to attend to."

Nyla gave a polite nod. "Of course, Ms. Wilkie."

As soon as Jane left, Valarie hurried over. "Nyla, I heard about what happened earlier. I'm so sorry I wasn't there for you!"

Meeting Valarie's worried gaze, Nyla reassured her, "Valarie, it's alright. It's not your fault.

She knew Jane would have made a move against her regardless of Valarie's presence.

What she didn't understand was Jane's hostility over a dress, especially at their first meeting. How could Jane risk ruining her grandfather's birthday celebration just to pick

on her? Valarie frowned. "Still, that maid was clearly following orders. You should call the police once the party's over.

Nyla nodded thoughtfully. "Mm, I know."

Valarie glanced at Nyla's dress, hesitant to speak. She wondered how Jane had gotten hold of an outdated dress for Nyla. If anyone else wore it, Jane probably would have outshone them. After a moment's hesitation, she added in a low voice, "I saw Jane talking with Rebecca

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outside earlier. I'm not sure what they were discussing, but you should be cautious around her."

If Rebecca had said something to Jane, this incident would make more sense.

It had been five years since Nyla had fallen into the sea, and Damon had already made Rebecca pay for her actions.

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Nyla had no intention of reopening old wounds. But if Rebecca dared to cross her path again, she wouldn't back down.

"Thank you, Valarie," Nyla replied.

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"Come on, no need for thanks!" Valarie nudged her.

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They turned to lighter topics and continued enjoying the party.

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Meanwhile, Jane slipped out toward the garden, only to be grabbed and pulled into the shadows near a rock formation. She gasped in fright, about to scream, but then frowned when she saw Gabriel. "Gabriel, you scared me! What are you doing?" she asked, patting her chest to calm herself. Gabriel remained impassive as he looked at her "Why did you have Pauline target Nyla?"

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Jane's gaze turned icy. "What's the matter? Feeling sorry for her now?"

Gabriel frowned. "Why would I feel sorry?"

"Don't think I don't know. Nyla used to be your stepsister. You liked her back then, didn't you?" Jane's eyes flashed with anger. If Rebecca hadn't told her, she might have still been in the dark. The thought of Gabriel ever having feelings for Nyla made her despise Nyla even more.

As dusk settled, shadows deepened around the rock formation, casting half of Gabriel's face in the darkness and making his expression harder to read.

"How did you find out?" he asked.

Jane scoffed. "How I found out doesn't matter. What matters is whether you're still hung up on her."

Gabriel chuckled, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "I never knew my dear Jane could look so adorable when she's jealous."

He reached out to pull her into his arms, but she pushed him back. "Don't touch me! You still haven't answered my question! And if I don't like your answer, you're not getting into my bed tonight!" "Since I met you, there's been no one else in my heart. If I'd known you were out there, I'd never have had feelings for anyone else. You and our son are all I need in this life," Gabriel professed. Looking into Gabriel's gentle eyes, Jane felt her anger dissolve, warmth spreading through her like sugar melting in warm water.

She smiled. "That's more like it. I almost thought you were here to defend Nyla!"

"How could I? It's just that she's still a guest who came with Damon. If he finds out you are behind it, who knows how he'll react? I don't want to ruin Grandpa's birthday celebration, Gabriel explained. "Don't worry. Pauline won't say a word," Jane assured him.

Pauline needed the money to cover her mother-in-law's medical bills. She wouldn't dare risk speaking out.

"Good," Gabriel replied.

He wrapped his arms around Jane, gently running his hand through her hair as if in thought. 1/2

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After a moment, Jane pulled away. "I have something to take care of. You should head back to the main hall."

He nodded. "Alright."

Once Jane was out of sight, Gabriel stepped out from the shadows of the rock garden, his face set in cold lines under the dim garden lights.

The party continued until after 11:00 p.m.

As guests slowly departed, Damon and Nyla lingered in the Wilkies' living room, clearly waiting for an explanation.

If it hadn't been for Pedro, Damon wouldn't have tolerated a maid nearly disfiguring Nyla -he would have shut down the party on the spot.

When Pedro learned what had happened, he came forward to apologize to Damon and Nyla directly. "Mr. Sumner, Ms. Kinsey, it was a failure on our part to ensure your comfort. I apologize deeply." Damon raised a hand to stop him, his face icy. "No need to apologize. I'd just like to know who ordered that maid to act out. It couldn't have been an outsider pulling the strings on a Wilkie maid." His tone was certain, implying he believed the attack had come from within the Wilkie family.

Pedro's expression darkened as he commanded coldly, "Bring Pauline here immediately- and get everyone in the family down to the living room!" Sensing his anger, the service staff hurried to carry out the orders. Within ten minutes, all the Wilkies had gathered in the living room.

Pauline was brought in as well, trembling, clearly frightened. She kept her head down, aware of the tense atmosphere filling the room.

