

## Impulsive Vow to an Enigmatic Husband Chapter 1711

### Chapter 1711

Zavier stumbled backwards, his eyes staring blankly at the entrance of the emergency room. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words would come out.

Nora gave him another shove. "What are you just standing there for? Go see your father already. What kind of a son are you? You'd be the reason he can't rest in peace."

Her words were like boulders crushing down on Zavier, leaving him gasping for breath. It took a while before Zavier could gather his wits. With unsteady steps, he shuffled toward the emergency room.

His father lay there, eyes shut, his complexion devoid of any color. Kalene was on her knees beside the bed, clutching Samuel's hand, her cries tearing through the silence.

Approaching, Zavier saw not just his father's pallid face but another face superimposed upon it.

A year ago, upon receiving the news, he immediately rushed to the hospital. His elder brother, Brodie, was lying on a cold hospital bed, his handsome face pale and distorted. That face, once so familiar, now seemed like the face of a stranger, almost unrecognizable.

Today felt like a cruel echo of that day.e2

Pain crept from Zavier's heart, spreading through his body, stiffening his limbs. He didn't want to believe it, yet he couldn't deny the truth.

A few days ago, the person he could have had a good conversation with had died.

Maybe, as everyone said, Zavier couldn't measure up to Brodie. Maybe his father's disappointment was so great that he couldn't wait to join his favored son.

The background noise of murmuring voices continued.

“If Xavier was half as sensible as Brodie, Samuel might not have been so heartbroken after Brodie’s death.”

“Zavier’s well into his twenties, about to graduate college, yet he’s still loafing around.”

“When Brodie was his age, he could already shoulder many responsibilities for Samuel and hold his own ground.”

“It’s Zavier’s fault his dad was so eager to leave this world and join Brodie.”

They all implied Samuel’s death was Zavier’s fault.

He spun around, his gaze sharp and cold as he scanned the faces of his kin. These were his relatives, but as their father passed, they seemed eager to blame him. They weren’t grieving. They wanted to crush him.

Zavier wouldn’t let their malicious intent prevail. “Get out! The last people my father would want to see are you soulless bastard. Do you even care about the bonds of family?”

The rest of the Rivera clan fell silent, except Nora. “Kalene, now that he’s gone, you need to rein in this wild child. You can’t let him. run amok.”

“Get out!” Zavier shot back.

Kalene, struggling to rise, tugged at Zavier’s sleeve. “Zavier...”

He turned and slowly crouched beside her. After a moment, he murmured, “Mom...”

Kalene collapsed, her strength leaving her with a single utterance of “Zavier.”

Zavier’s heart skipped a beat. “Mom.”

Someone chimed in, “Look at that. Your whole family’s falling apart because of you. Are you happy now?”

“Call the doctor!” Zavier demanded.

Skyler received the news of Samuel’s passing two days later. Samuel’s body had already been cremated at the funeral home, and his ashes brought back to Rivera Manor.

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Skyler arrived at the Rivera Manor with not a soul to pick her up from school. She had to hail a cab that dropped her off just outside the upscale neighborhood, leaving her to trek the remaining distance on foot.

There were a lot of people at Rivera's Manor. All the members of the Rivera family and close friends and relatives were present, including Skyler's parents.

She was the last to arrive.

No sooner had she stepped into the yard than a voice hissed, "Jinx!"

Skyler's eyes darted around, trying to locate the source of the insult amidst the several stares fixed upon her. She couldn't pinpoint who had uttered the word.

Samuel had been in poor health ever since he'd lost his son, and though the recent incident had nothing to do with Skyler, there were whispers blaming her.

It was reminiscent of the way some had tried to pin Samuel's demise on Zavier, Samuel's remaining son. Thankfully, Zavier had a will of steel and wasn't easily shaken by their mind games.e2

Skyler's lips parted to retort, but considering the solemnity of the occasion, she held her tongue.

Barbara tugged at Skyler's arm. "What took you so long?"

Even Skyler's parents from Southern Port had arrived. Skyler had received the news only recently and indeed, it was hard to justify her delay.

It had been two days since the incident, and it seemed the Rivera family had forgotten about Skyler altogether. No one had bothered to inform her. Besides, the Riveras had kept the matter tightly under wraps, with no media coverage. It was only after a call from Barbara that Skyler was in the loop.

“I came as soon as I got the call,” Skyler explained, her voice a mix of haste and regret.

Barbara dragged Skyler to a secluded corner and jabbed her finger sharply against Skyler’s forehead, leaving angry red marks. “You’ve been in the Capital for months now, and you’ve made no progress whatsoever.”

Skyler winced in pain and tried to dodge, but Barbara pinched her waist fiercely. “I’m talking to you. Don’t you play dumb with me.” “Today is Samuel’s funeral. Shouldn’t we show some respect?” Skyler countered, her patience wearing thin.

“Scaring me with the Rivera family? Don’t think I don’t know that Zavier hasn’t touched you once. What are you pretending for?” Barbara scoffed.

Skyler chose to ignore her.

Given the crowd at the Rivera estate, Barbara wouldn’t dare make a scene. “We’ll settle this later. For now, come with me.”

Skyler followed Barbara mechanically..

Barbara approached the old butler, her demeanor instantly softening. “My dear Skyler is here. Should we have her join Zavier in the vigil?”

After Brodie’s death, Zavier became Samuel’s only child. Draped in mourning clothes, he was receiving all the guests who came to pay their respects.

As Zavier’s fiancée, Skyler was expected to join him to keep vigil for Samuel, according to local customs.

Whether the Rivera family was too preoccupied to remember Skyler or had other reasons, they hadn’t even informed her of Samuel’s passing, let alone her expected role in the vigil.

The old butler, not daring to make such decisions himself, especially with Hudson bedridden and the second son of the family in charge.

Hudson had a total of three sons. The eldest had passed away. The second son, Matthew, had a high chance of inheriting the family business, and to ensure a better future, the old butler had to curry favor with him.

The old butler subconsciously looked towards Matthew. Unexpectedly, Matthew's gaze was right in their direction, as if he was waiting for the butler to report to him.

The butler hurried over, bowing respectfully. "Mr. Matthew, may I ask how you wish to arrange for Ms. Skyler's participation?"

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Matthew's face was etched with gravity as he spoke, "Ms. Skyler is the fiancée Hudson picked out for Xavier, and Samuel gave his blessing too. Hurry up and get her dressed to keep Xavier company through the wake."

The aged butler nodded, "Right away. Miss Skyler, please follow me."

Skyler trailed after the butler.

Barbara tagged along, but after a few steps, she turned back, flashing Matthew a smile, "Hey, Matthew, thanks."

He returned the smile but remained silent.

Sierra's voice echoed softly, "What's that old bat up to now?"

Matthew replied dryly, "Brown-nosing, obviously."e2

Sierra scoffed, "What a tramp."

He shrugged, "The Blues are stirring the pot, but they're not worth our time."

Sierra watched Skyler's retreating figure, then glanced at Xavier, "You know Xavier wants no part of this marriage, yet you send the Blue girl to his side. Aren't you afraid he'll cause a scene?"

A cold smile played on Matthew's lips, "That's precisely what I'm counting on. If he doesn't make a scene, Hudson, out of sympathy for his late son and grandson, might just soften up and hand Rivera Inc.'s reins to that little punk."

Sierra countered, "Everyone has a soft spot, but not Hudson. When Brodie died, Hudson seized control of Rivera Inc. faster than lightning. He was

worried we couldn't handle Brodie's loyalists. At his age, he's still got a vice grip on the helm. A man that obsessed with power? Soften up? Hardly."

Matthew mused, "That's what everyone thinks. But I've got this nagging feeling Hudson's hiding something. What if he's gone. stupid and hands the wheel of the Rivera family to Xavier?"

Sierra retorted, "Even if Hudson does, can that wild card Xavier handle it? The guy spends his days gaming with his entourage, never minding the family business. He's practically a write-off. What's there to worry about?"

"You don't know jack," Matthew shot back. "Xavier may seem like a slacker, but he's actually turned a pretty penny with a few games his team developed."

"Profitable games?" Sierra scoffed. "Can they compare to Rivera Inc.'s profits? Knowing games doesn't mean he knows management. He's clueless about running a business. Rivera Inc. would crumble in his hands. Unless Hudson's lost his marbles, he'd never entrust the Rivera legacy to him."

Matthew pointed out, "Hudson's health is failing day by day. After this blow, it's only a matter of time. It's a critical moment for Rivera Inc.'s succession. I must achieve something significant during this period to show him who the most suitable heir is."

Sierra hinted, "I heard Owen's courting the Dixon Group from Harbor City. If he nails a strategic partnership with them, our

chances will dwindle."

Matthew reasoned, "Hudson's set up the Blues from Southern Port for Xavier. Owen's vying for a partnership with the Dixons. Given the choice between the Blues and the Dixons, Hudson will pick the Dixons, hands down."

"So what are you suggesting?" Sierra probed.

"Owen's been talking to the Dixon Group for ages, even had a few minor collaborations. Snatching them is next to impossible. If we want to win, and become Hudson's obvious choice for succession, we need to secure a deal with the Hartley Group."

"You're thinking of reaching out to Marcus?" Sierra asked, her voice tinged with a mix of surprise and anticipation.

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Matt nodded, "Yeah. If we can get Marcus on board, no one will stand a chance against my rise to the top."

Just the mention of the name "Marcus" made Sierra's skin crawl. "Marcus' rep is terrifying. I'm worried it's like making a deal with the devil. We might not just fail to benefit from it, and we could end up in over our heads. Maybe we should consider other options?"

Matt was resolute. "To win big, you've got to play bold moves. If Marcus agrees to back me, I'm willing to pay a steeper price than anyone."

"Marcus doesn't care about family ties," Sierra pointed out.

"He might not care for his old man, but he's a businessman-he can't ignore cold hard cash. We just have to make the offer juicy enough. He'll bite," Matt countered.

Sierra wanted to argue, but Matt waved her off, silencing any further protest. He gestured toward the wake.

Following his gaze, Sierra saw Skyler, now dressed in a mourning suit, obediently staying beside Zavier. Confused, she murmured, "That hot-headed kid is actually keeping his cool? That's not like him at all."e2

"With his brother and father gone, he's cut off from any fallback. He's not an idiot. If he doesn't rein in his temper, who's going to clean up his messes?" Matt explained.

"He's more adaptable than I thought," Sierra conceded.

On Skyler and Zavier's side.

Skyler was next to Xavier, mirroring his actions in silence. Time seemed to stretch on until Xavier seemed to finally notice her presence. "Why did you get here?"

His voice was hoarse, as if scorched by grief.

"You need some water?" Skyler asked, concerned.

Zavier ignored her offer.

Skyler quietly grabbed a small bottle of water and handed it to him, whispering, "I am sorry for your loss."

Zavier chuckled. "Everyone's got to go sometime. Early or late, death comes for us all. What's there to be sorry about?"

Skyler didn't reply. Though Zavier spoke casually, his tone and demeanor said otherwise. His heart was far from indifferent.

"Do you know about one of our family traditions?" Zavier asked.

"What tradition?" Skyler was clueless.

Zavier, realizing that this little fool probably didn't know, said, "You being with me today is more important for us, the Rivera family, than that marriage certificate."

Skyler didn't understand, "What do you mean?"

Zavier explained, "It is like announcing to everyone that you are mine, and you are the granddaughter-in-law recognized by the Rivera family. Whether we have that marriage certificate in the future or not, you are still mine."

Skyler was taken aback, but it didn't seem to bother her much. "Our fates have been forced together by them. Unless we both become strong enough to break free, what difference do these formalities make?"

"You see things pretty clearly," Zavier remarked.

Skyler had always been perceptive, yet many things were beyond her power to change. She pushed the water bottle into his hand, murmuring, "What good is clarity if it changes nothing?"



Zavier unscrewed the cap and downed the water in one go. "Last year, this time, I had my brother's affection and my father's love. I could do whatever I wanted without a worry."

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Skyler felt a pang of sympathy for Zavier, though she couldn't quite understand the depth of his pain. She suspected that, unlike her, he had known affection at some point in his life.

Zavier spoke again, his voice betraying a hint of vulnerability beneath its calm veneer. "It hasn't been that long. I've lost my brother, and now my dad's gone too. Mom's had a breakdown, and she's bedridden."

Despite his stoic delivery, Skyler's heart ached for him. Instinctively, she reached out and placed her hand gently atop his. "Zavier, if you don't mind that I'm not of much use, I could be your friend. We could stand together and change this twisted fate that was never meant for us."

Zavier turned, his icy gaze meeting Skyler's naive yet resolute eyes, making her feel slightly uneasy. "If you don't want to, just pretend I never said anything."

"You want to be my friend, to stand with me, but do you even know what I'm up against?" he asked.

"Does it matter?" Skyler replied.

"You might end up like my brother and father, gone in the blink of an eye,"

Skyler's mouth dropped open as she realized the implication. "Are you saying there was foul play involved in your father and brother's deaths?"

Zavier's smile was cold. "Even if you are scared, you've got no way out now. The Blue Family sent you to be my wife. Like it or not, we're in the same boat now."

Skyler bit her lip, her eyes fierce with determination. "I'm not scared."

"Really?" he asked.

"I've always wanted to live a life of dignity and freedom. No matter what happens, I remind myself that nothing is more important than life itself. But sometimes, I feel that living in such a wretched way is worse than dying."

"Coward," Xavier scoffed.

"But those thoughts are fleeting. I would never do something foolish. I have to live well, to live the life I want."

Xavier looked at her, a rare smile breaking through. "Just don't regret it."

"I won't."

His gaze shifted back to the urn on the altar. "Who told you to come here?"

"My mother," Skyler answered.

Xavier fell silent, having anticipated much of this.

After the passing of the eldest son, rumors spread that old man Hudson had been stricken with grief and bedridden.

The mourning lasted seven days, and throughout, no one saw Hudson. There were only two people Hudson would see, his private physician and his personal nutritionist.

Thus, Skyler only met Hudson after Samuel's ashes were buried. She didn't know how Hudson had coped these past few days, but

it was evident that his condition had worsened.

As the guests departed, the Rivera family remained at the manor.

Unexpectedly, all the major directors and executives of Rivera Inc. attended. Even without much understanding of such affairs, Skyler could tell they were there with a purpose that was far from friendly.

She sat quietly by Xavier's side, not daring to utter a word amid the crowd.

Matthew, ever the opportunist, addressed Hudson. "Dad, your friends were concerned about your health and came to see how you're doing

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Hudson squinted his eyes slightly, sweeping his gaze over everyone present, and said, "I may be getting on in years, but I'm not stupid. I know exactly what each of you is up to."

At these words, some of the faces in the room turned sour.

Skyler saw one of the guys speaking up. "We're all just concerned about Rivera Inc.. That's all."

Hudson retorted, "What's wrong with Rivera Inc.? Has the stock plummeted? Is the company in such poor shape it's about to go under? Or do you think this old man is too feeble to manage such a big enterprise?"

The man opened his mouth as if to speak, thought better of it, and remained silent.

Hudson turned his sharp gaze to his two sons, "Matthew, Owen, your brother has just been laid to rest, and already you're itching to take over?"

Owen quickly interjected, "Dad, what are you saying? After the funeral, the board members were just worried about you grieving too much. They wanted to check on you. As for Matthew and me taking over, I don't know about his plans, but I certainly have no such intentions. My mind is fully focused on Rivera Inc.'s operations. In fact, I've been in talks with the Dixon Group from Harbor City about a partnership, and if all goes well, we should be sealing a strategic deal soon."e2

Owen's words, though business-focused, were clearly a display of his bargaining chips.

With the board members present, Matthew was not one to just watch Owen shine, "Dad, even though my wife and I have been by your side, tending to you and seldom involving ourselves in the company's affairs, we haven't been idle. We're currently in contact with the Hartley Group from Riverton. If we can strike a deal with them, it would be a huge boon for Rivera Inc."

Skyler initially didn't pay much attention when hearing about "the Dixon Group," but at the mention of "the Hartley Group," he glanced sideways at Zavier. The people Owen and Matthew were so eagerly courting were all friends of Zavier. Could it be that Zavier wasn't the idle figure everyone

perceived him to be? Was it possible he had been preparing to take over Rivera Inc. all along?

As Skyler pondered this, sure enough, Hudson's gaze shifted in their direction, "Zavier..." All eyes in the room followed suit.

Zavier, on the other hand, was casual and at ease, "Granddad, I'm here."

Hudson went on, "Both your brother and father have passed away, and now it's just you and your mother left in your branch of the family. I know it's tough, but now is not the time for sorrow."

Zavier asked unhurriedly, "What would you like me to do, Grandpa?"

Hudson replied, "I heard you and your friends developed a video game. Focus on that game of yours. If you need funds, let me know. I'll have your aunt provide you with the capital."

Hudson was indirectly telling Zavier to concentrate on his own projects and to stop eyeing Rivera Inc.

Skyler wasn't sure if he was interpreting this message correctly, but the looks directed at Zavier were filled with inscrutable speculation.

Under the scrutiny of the room, Zavier shrugged, with a carefree smile on his face, "Thanks, Grandpa. But no need, I'm fully capable of making enough money to support our little family."

Nora spoke up, "Dad, you should focus on your health first and foremost. The company's in good hands with so many board members and executives to oversee it. I reckon those with ill intentions wouldn't dare make a move under your watchful eye."

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#### Chapter 1717

Hudson waved his hands dismissively, "We've been at it for days, and everyone's beat. Each of you go back to rest, and do whatever you need to do tomorrow. My health is much better than you think."

With the conversation seemingly at its end, there was no reason for anyone to linger. One by one, they rose from their seats and made for the door.

Skyler got up to leave alongside Xavier, but Hudson's voice halted her, "Skyler, stick around and have dinner with me, will ya? I'll have the driver take you back to school later."

Skyler glanced at Xavier, who said nothing and walked out ahead. The others gave Skyler curious looks, clearly wondering about Hudson's intentions.

Skyler paid them no mind and turned back to Hudson, "Grandpa."

Hudson patted the seat beside him, gesturing for Skyler to sit, then looked up sharply at the others, "Anyone else fancy staying for dinner?"

No one was really keen on staying. They were just itching to know why Hudson wanted Skyler to stay behind. No one dared dampen Hudson's spirits, so they politely made their exits.e2

Once they had left, Hudson turned to the old butler, "Go over to Brodie's place, and bring back some of the clothes he wore." The butler understood Hudson wanted him to leave, "Sir, Brodie's belongings have been here for a while. You even cleared out a room for his things, remember?"

Hudson's voice turned icy, "Are you saying I've lost my memory? It seems you're confused about who's in charge here."

Startled, the butler quickly nodded, "No offense meant, Sir. I'll go fetch them."

After the butler left, Hudson grasped Skyler's hand, patting it gently, "Kid, has anyone been filling your head with nonsense?" Skyler shook her head, "No, Grandpa."

In those days, Skyler and Xavier kept vigil together, rarely parting. During the brief moments they were apart, she could hear some deliberately spoken gossip. It mostly blamed her as a jinx, claiming that she brought misfortune to the Rivera family, which supposedly led to the sudden death of Xavier's father. However, Skyler did not blame herself for those gossips. She was determined not to let those people with malicious intentions succeed.

Hudson looked at Skyler, affirming, "You don't have to cover for them. I'm well aware of what they've done to you and Zavier. And let me be clear, you had nothing to do with his father's passing."

Skyler nodded, "I understand, Grandpa."

Pleased, Hudson continued, "No matter what they say, don't you pay them any mind. Just focus on building a life with Zavier, got it?"

Skyler nodded obediently, "I will, Grandpa."

Hudson was about to say more when he suddenly clutched his chest, coughing violently.

Skyler quickly supported him, "Are you alright?"

Hudson's personal doctor rushed in, administering medication promptly, "Hudson, you know the state of your health better than anyone. You need to take it easy, especially now."

After the medicine took effect, Hudson relaxed a bit, "Don't make it sound so dire. You will worry the kid."

The doctor had more on his mind but held his tongue in Skyler's presence, quietly stepping back.

Skyler handed Hudson a glass of warm water, "Please, Grandpa, you must listen to the doctor and take care of yourself. We need you to get better."

Leaning back in his chair, Hudson's voice grew faint, "You know, it's like this with age-our bodies start to act up. But it's nothing serious. Don't fret over me."

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Skyler couldn't quite grasp the full extent of the situation, so she wisely chose to hold her tongue.

Hudson continued, "You've seen how things have been these past few days. Everyone seems to have it out for Zavier." Sensitive topics were a minefield,

and Skyler dared not tread any further. She opted to listen silently as Hudson spoke.

The old man chuckled, "I'm not dead yet, but there are plenty who wish I were, eager to carve up my estate. Sometimes, I envy those average families, with loving fathers and dutiful children."

Skyler envied them too, but fate had dealt her a different hand, placing her in the family she was born into.

Hudson looked at her and asked, "Child, you understand what I'm talking about, right?"

Skyler nodded, "Grandpa, Zavier isn't as bad as everyone makes him out to be."e2

Hudson laughed, "Look at you, already defending your fiancé. And he won't even let you live with him, yet you speak on his behalf." Skyler clarified, "Grandpa, I'm not defending him. I'm just telling you what I've seen. And it's not that he won't let me live with him. I chose to stay at the dorms."

Hudson sighed, "I know what my grandchildren are like."

Skyler wasn't sure if Hudson truly knew, but she wanted to believe him when he said so.

The conversation took a sudden turn when Hudson asked, "Do you know why I chose you to be Zavier's fiancée?"

Skyler, ever so straightforward, blurted out, "Isn't it because of the Blue family?"

"Indeed, it's because of the Blue family," Hudson confirmed. "Your family isn't powerful enough to be a pillar for Zavier."

Skyler thought she understood. Perhaps Hudson had given up on Zavier, and that was why he arranged such a match. However the next words from Hudson took her by surprise, shattering her assumptions spectacularly.

Hudson looked out the floor-to-ceiling window, gazing into the distance, "Zavier's brother had a girl he liked, from the Capital's Duran family. You've heard of the Duran family, haven't you?"

Skyler nodded.

The Duran family was well-known.

Hudson continued, "Once Brodie marries the girl from the Duran family, all of the Durans would back Brodie. Then there'd be nothing stopping Brodie from taking over Rivera Inc. But alas..."

At this point, Hudson's voice cracked, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Skyler, worried that Hudson was revisiting painful memories, quickly comforted him, "Grandpa, you don't have to talk about it. Your health is more important."

"If I don't speak now, I might never get another chance," Hudson said, blinking back tears. "The tragedy struck just when the Rivera and Duran families were about to settle the kids' marriage – Brodie had an accident."

Listening to Hudson's words, Skyler recalled what Xavier had mentioned before. If Brodie and Samuel's deaths were orchestrated, who could be responsible?

Every member of the Rivera family was a suspect.

Chills ran down Skyler's spine as she pondered these thoughts.

"Brodie had an accident, and so did his father." Hudson refocused on Skyler, "Xavier is too young, not yet powerful enough. Giving him an equal match would only doom him."

Skyler suddenly understood. Hudson was using this approach to protect Xavier.

Hudson added, "Now, Xavier stands at a crossroads. One path is to stick to his gaming, live an honest life without harbouring any illusions about Rivera Inc. having anything to do with him. As for the other path..."

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“Grandpa, I know which path to take into the future, so you don’t need to worry about me. What’s most important right now is for you to take care of yourself and not let those people get under your skin.”

Zavier’s voice suddenly echoed from the doorway, interrupting their conversation.

Skyler whirled around, startled. Zavier, who had supposedly left earlier, had reappeared at the living room entrance without her noticing. “You-you didn’t leave?”

Striding in with a light and graceful gait, Zavier seemed unaffected by the earlier melancholy. His eyes shone with a bright intensity.

Hudson frowned disapprovingly, “What do you think you know? If you really knew anything, I wouldn’t be an old man losing sleep over your future.”

Zavier sat down next to Hudson, “Grandpa, I know everything you’ve been doing is to help me. You kept Skyler here to show those sharks that even though I’m not fit to take over Rivera Inc., I’m still your grandson, and you wouldn’t just leave me high and dry. But have you considered what all this is doing to this scaredy-cat?”

Hudson replied confidently, “I’ve got her back. They wouldn’t dare touch her.”e2

Zavier pressed on, “But you know what they say about this scaredy-cat behind her back, don’t you?”

Hudson said firmly, “Skyler is your fiancée. Stop calling her a scaredy-cat. She was just defending you a moment ago.”

Zavier turned to Skyler, “You were speaking up for me?”

Skyler responded matter-of-factly, “I was just telling the truth.”

Little did she know, she was the real naif, thinking the grandfather and grandson were at odds when they were actually putting on a show for everyone to see. She hadn’t seen through it at all before. And she wondered if those smarter than her had caught on. Zavier chuckled, “When everyone else thinks I’m down and out, you stand up for me. I can’t decide if that makes you foolish or something else altogether.”

Skyler was speechless. This man sure had a sharp tongue. She wished she hadn't bothered defending him.

Hudson reached out, tapping Xavier on the head, "You're a good kid with a mouth that could start a riot. Even your concern comes out sounding like an insult."

Zavier shot back, "If I weren't sharp-tongued, how would I deal with those vipers?"

Hudson, wishing to bypass the banter, took Skyler's hand and placed it in Xavier's, "Skyler is a good kid. You better treat her right. No more letting her get pushed around."

Zavier clasped Skyler's hand firmly in his, "Since she's spoken well of me, I won't let anyone bully her again."

Skyler's hand was cold, but Xavier's was warm and comforting. It felt as if a steady stream of warmth flowed from their clasped hands into Skyler, thawing her chilled body and heart.

She glanced up at Xavier, but he wasn't looking at her. His expression turned serious, "Grandpa, have you found any leads?"

Hudson sighed, "We've ruled out some suspects, but the real culprit is still out there."

Zavier echoed the frustration, "I've eliminated Matthew and Owen as possible assailants. Grandpa, now I can't help but suspect someone we never doubted before."

Hudson knew exactly who Xavier was referring to. They communicated in a silent understanding, leaving Skyler feeling utterly confused.

Hudson mused, "I used to think she was the least likely since even if something happened to your father and brother, she wouldn't be next in line for Rivera Inc. But now, it seems more possible than ever."

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Could this mysterious figure be Nora? Skyler had no clue.

Zavier said, "Grandpa, if it turns out everything was her doing, I won't go easy on her. You better brace yourself."

"I've allowed them to showcase their talents without turning on each other. If it comes to light that she's responsible for both incidents..." Hudson paused, as if steeling himself for what he had to say next, "then what must be done, will be done.""

Zavier nodded, "Grandpa, that's all I needed to hear."

Hudson continued, "The butler might be back soon. Best you take Skyler and leave now."

"I wanted to stay and have dinner with you," Zavier said.

"Not today. When you find out the real culprit, take over Rivera Inc., and have the ability to make everyone acknowledge you, then come and have a meal with me." Hudson replied.

Zavier knew now was not the time to reveal that he and Hudson were putting on an act. He stood up, "Come on, Scaredy-cat, let's go."

Skyler got up too, "Take care, Grandpa. We'll head out now."

Impatiently, Hudson waved them off, "Go on. Get outta here. Having you youngsters around is like a non-stop racket in my ears." As Zavier and Skyler walked away, Hudson felt a twinge of comfort but then remembered something crucial. "Zavier, leave by a different route. There were cameras in the house. You can't be caught together."

"Don't worry. No one knows the surveillance system better than me," Zavier assured him.

The thought of his beloved grandson having to sneak around his own home, unable to openly share a meal, pained Hudson deeply. "Zavier, I'm sorry."

"Grandpa, you taught me when I was very young not to punish myself for someone else's mistakes. I remember it well. How could you forget?" Zavier said with a small smile.

Hudson smiled back, satisfied, "Alright then, off you go."

Not wanting to linger, Xavier led Skyler to the front door. “I’ll leave through a side exit. Have the driver take you out of the villa, and I’ll wait for you outside the compound.”

Skyler nodded, “Okay.”

The driver, a loyal confidante of Hudson’s, took Skyler out of the estate. As they left, a car was parked ahead. “Miss Skyler, you should switch to Xavier’s car now.”

“That’s Xavier’s ride?” Skyler asked, surprised.

Xavier’s usual choice was a sports car, and the family’s garage was filled with luxury brands. The car in front of her was a nondescript sedan, likely not worth more than twenty thousand.

The driver confirmed, “Yes.”

Skyler hurriedly got out and into Xavier’s car. Once she was settled, Xavier floored the accelerator, and the sedan shot forward, but they weren’t heading towards school.

“Where are you taking me?” Skyler asked.

To meet your future mother-in-law,” Zavjer said with a straight face.

That joke isn’t funny at all,” Skyler retorted.

“My mom wants to meet you. She asked me to bring you home for dinner,” Xavier explained.

“Your father’s passing hit her hard. She hasn’t been looking well. You should look after her more,” Skyler advised.

A chuckle escaped Xavier’s lips, “Skyler, you’re in hot water yourself, and here you are worrying about others.”

“Do you think I want to worry about others? We’re in the same boat. If your rock collapses and can’t get back up, guess who’s going to suffer too?” Skyler shot back.

**"Impulsive Vow to an Enigmatic Husband"**

