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"And by God, would she enjoy watching them get slandered—because for every lie they told, every piece of her they broke, she knew the truth would one day come crashing down, and she'd savor every second of their downfall."

Estelle stood in the middle of her room, her eyes gliding down her reflection. She looked with her chocolate-brown hair falling down her face in waves. Although she appeared calm, inside she was trembling and tightening with nervousness. But she had to do it.

In the past few months of her breakdown, Estelle had learned one harsh lesson: if she didn't step up for herself, if she didn't purge the past completely, it would one day explode, leaving her too stunned to reel it back in. Just like yesterday. She had frozen, unable to speak as Hunter believed Carla's lies all over again. But this time, things were different. This time, she wasn't going to stay quiet—not anymore.

She knew Carla better than anyone. They had been friends for far too long, and Estelle had seen it all—the subtle greed, the small manipulations—but

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she had ignored it because it was the first time someone wanted her things, and she gladly gave them all, taking Carla as her sister. Carla must have thought Estelle hadn't noticed, but she had. She'd seen it all, except for the one thing that mattered most—that Carla had been coveting Hunter right under her nose. Maybe that was because, when it came to Hunter, Estelle always lost her senses.

And oddly enough, she discovered their betrayal in an unexpected way. The memory of it still gives her chills. The camera she had set up to capture content that day had captured something devastating — her trusted friend Carla and the man she loved, Hunter, kissing in her room. The shock felt like an avalanche, freezing her from the inside out, and she could still vividly recall that feeling. If Carla, whom she considered more than a friend and knew how deeply she loved Hunter, could betray her like that, then yesterday's events should not have been a surprise — but it was. When Carla played the victim and Hunter stood by her, defending her just as he had years ago, Estelle was too stunned to speak or fight back.

The door to her room swung open, and Estelle turned to see her mother, Anna, rushing toward her.

"Estelle," her mother gasped, her voice trembling as she hurried across the room.

"Mother," Estelle whispered, noticing her puffy eyes. "I told you not to cry. I have to do this, so please don't make it harder than it already is."

Anna shook her head, waving her hand in protest, but there was a strange smile on her lips. "That's not it. It's just that... you don't need to go anywhere."

Estelle's brow furrowed in confusion. "Why not? I have already booked the interview with the media. Don't tell me you stopped it."

Her mother shook her head. "No, I didn't do anything like that. But I think you should see this." She pulled out her phone, tapping it a few times before handing it to Estelle.

The blood drained from Estelle's face as she pressed play. On the screen was the CCTV footage from the night of the pool incident—the night Carla had lied about being pushed.

"How... how did this get out?" Estelle asked, her voice barely above a whisper. She turned to her mother, wide-eyed. Other than the security team in charge of the CCTV footage, only she and her family knew of the video, and they had reluctantly

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sworn not to speak of it.

Anna shook her head. "It wasn't us. I made your father and brother promise to keep the footage private until you were ready to release it yourself."

Estelle's mind raced. She had specifically asked the security team to keep the footage under wraps, so how had it leaked? Her eyes flicked to the headline below the video: *Carla Exposed—Estelle Vindicated*.

"I heard it was revealed at the shareholder meeting today," Anna said softly, "A man stood up for you. Wait, let me remember his name. Ha...Hay ..."

"Ryan Hayes," Estelle murmured, her mind still reeling with disbelief and confusion.

Anna's face lit up at the help, and she clapped her hands as if showing appreciation. "Yes, him," Anna confirmed. "He exposed the truth when they were slandering you. Those shareholders, I can't believe they switched sides so quickly."

Estelle exhaled, her thoughts swirling. "Wealthy people always side with whoever benefits them more."

Anna looked like she wanted to protest but

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decided against it. Instead, she gently placed her hand on her daughter's arm, her expression filled with concern. "You don't have to do the interview anymore, okay?"

Estelle hesitated for only a moment before shaking her head. "No. I'm going through with it. I have already booked the meeting, and I need to face this. I can't keep hiding while other people fight my battles for me."

Yes, she should. She must. It was time she stopped being a Mother Teresa. It was time she stopped being selfless, taking the feelings of the people she once cared about into consideration when they didn't reciprocate the act.

Her mother sighed, reluctant but understanding. "If that's what you want."

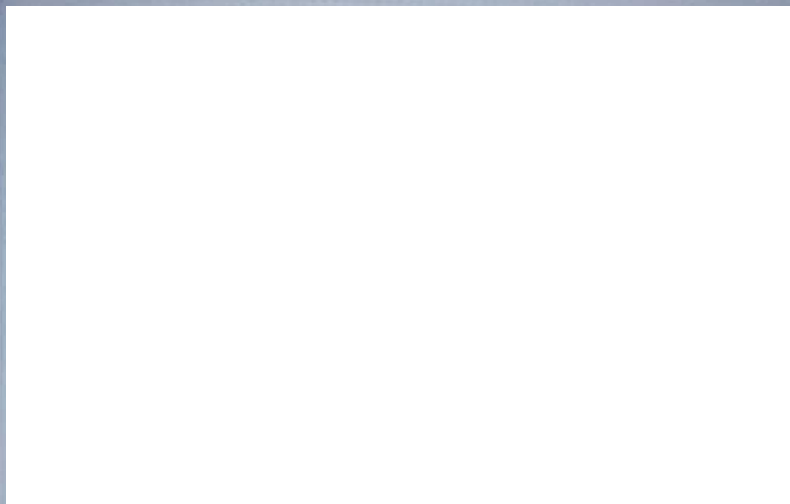
A few hours later, Estelle found herself seated in front of the cameras. The bright lights and murmurs of the production team faded as she got lost in her emotions. This was it. The moment she had been avoiding for so long. Her face was calm, but inside, she was trembling with a mixture of nervousness and self-doubt.

The interview began, and the first reporter, a man with slicked-back hair and a too-perfect smile,

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wasted no time. "Estelle, thank you for agreeing to this interview. First things first—how are you feeling after everything that's happened with Carla?"

Estelle's lips quirked into a small, knowing smile. "



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Well, the truth is out, so I'd say I'm feeling... liberated."

The man blinked, surprised by her directness, but he recovered quickly. "Speaking of the truth and liberation, the world was shocked to learn that you didn't push Carla. Given your history together, do you think her accusations were because she felt

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threatened by you or part of her bigger plan?"

Estelle tilted her head thoughtfully. "Carla? Threatened? Planning?" Then she chuckled. "I don't know if she's that strategic or feels threatened, especially by me," she let out a short laugh. "But I do think she knew what she was doing when it came to playing the victim. It wasn't just about me. It was about taking what she couldn't have. It's a trait she's honed over the years."

The room buzzed with murmurs and shutter clicks, and another reporter, a woman with deep-rimmed glasses, leaned forward. "You and Carla were close for years. How does it feel knowing she betrayed you and went after Hunter?"

Estelle's expression hardened, but she kept her voice light. "Oh, it hurts, of course. Mostly because I trusted her. I shared everything with her—my life, my dreams, my love for Hunter. And she took advantage of that. So, if you ask me how I feel? Well, I felt broken for a long time. But I've realized that things that are truly mine can never be stolen by her or anyone else."

Murmurs followed her response again and almost immediately, another reporter quickly jumped in, "According to all your statements, you were the one

who introduced Carla to Hunter. Do you regret bringing her into your life now that she's with him?

"

Estelle's lips curled into a bitter smile. "Regret? No, I don't believe in regret. I believe in lessons. Carla taught me a valuable one—never assume someone is who they pretend to be. But if she's happy with Hunter, then so be it."

The reporters scribbled furiously on their notepads while furiously taking shots of her.

"There have been rumours for years about your complicated relationship with Hunter." Another started. "Did you ever suspect that he would leave you for Carla, or were you blindsided when you found out?"

Estelle straightened, her expression cool but her inside heating up. "I think anyone who's been in love knows it's easy to lose sight of reality. I didn't see it coming because I trusted him—too much, maybe. But trust is a fragile thing, and once it's broken... Well, let's just say I've learned to be more careful about who I let into my heart."

Her heart tightened as she thought of all her sacrifices, from her teenage years until adulthood, and still nothing. She had thought trying harder

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would make him eventually love her. At one point, she thought he already did, and God, was she happy. But never did she think he would go back to Carla after getting married to her. Never...

"Do you still have feelings for Hunter?" A reporter shot out, cutting through her thoughts, and the room fell into silence, but with cameras still poised.

Estelle blinked at the camera, her eyes blank, as the conversation suddenly changed direction. Did she still have feelings for Hunter? Her mind spiraled around the times she saw him—at the office, the party, everywhere. Seeing him still hurt, pulling a type of feeling, but was it still love? "I don't think I'd call it that anymore," she replied. "What I feel for him now is more of... disappointment. I thought he was someone I could trust and love until eternity, but clearly, I was wrong."

The room was silent for another moment, no flashes, just the reporters looking at Estelle, stunned by her honesty.

"After all the lies and betrayal, do you plan on seeking any kind of revenge?" A voice said from the reporters, breaking the silence.

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Estelle chuckled softly, shaking her head as she did. "Revenge? No, that's not really my style. I think the truth is a far better weapon than anything I could come up with."

The room erupted with more questions, flashes, and the sound of shutters clicking. But Estelle remained composed, finally feeling like she had regained some form of control in her life. She had been quiet for far too long, letting others speak for her, letting others define her. But now, the tables had turned, and she was ready to make sure Hunter and Carla regretted ever underestimating her.

Finally, the interview came to an end. And as Estelle walked out of the studio, she could already hear the questions the world would be asking next. And by God, would she enjoy watching them get slandered.



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