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*"With every lie, every betrayal, the world I built comes crumbling down, leaving nothing but dust and regret."*

"I have as much right in this company as every one of you, so how can you all just sit here and decide my dismissal?" Hunter roared, slamming his fist hard on the table. The sharp thud echoed through the boardroom, but not a single person flinched. In fact, the shareholders exchanged glances with the same bored expressions, as if they were witnessing nothing more than a childish tantrum, which only fueled Hunter's anger.

"No one's denying your rights, Hunter," a shareholder spoke up, his tone calm but authoritative, as if addressing a bad-tempered child. "But your rights became irrelevant the moment your personal life started disrupting our business. We're not here to manage your scandals. We're here to manage a company. And we can't do that when you can't seem to manage your own affairs."

Murmurs of agreement followed, adding fuel to Hunter's already burning anger. His fingers dug

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into the edge of the table, knuckles white from the strain. Yes, they were right about the rumors circling him, but that shouldn't be the cause of this. Not after everything he'd done for the company.

He leaned forward, the heat of his rage reflected in his glare. "You think I want that too? I can't believe you're all acting like I haven't given everything to this company! I've bled for this place, just as much as any of you. I put my sweat and blood into this company," he snarled, his voice rough with barely contained anger. "Every hour, every sleepless night. And you think I want to see it all come crashing down because of some—some rumors?"

"They're more than rumors, Hunter." The same shareholder countered, with an arched brow. "Your relationship with Carla—your failed marriage—these aren't just rumors. The public sees it. The stock market sees it. And we all feel it."

The rest murmured their agreement.

Hunter swayed, his grip on the table tightening as he felt his pulse throbbing at his temples, the onset of a headache. They were right; he couldn't deny that. Still, they had no right to dismiss him because of it.



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"I've kept this company afloat despite the rumors," he said in a low voice, trembling with emotion. "You don't know half of what I've done behind the scenes to keep things from falling apart."

"We know plenty," another shareholder—a portly man with thin hair and a round face that almost hid his eyes—interrupted, his fatty hands folded in front of him. "We know enough, but we can't sit by and watch your personal issues continue bleeding into our business. And we've decided—"

"No," Hunter cut him off, his voice shaking with anger. "You don't get to decide. I've built this company just as much as any of you. I've given everything. Everything."

"Then do us all a favor and step down while there's still something left to save," another shareholder—a grey-haired man with a terrible hairline and cold, calculating eyes—spoke up, his voice smooth as ice. "It's the only thing that'll save this company now."

Hunter's chest heaved with conflicting emotions as the room fell into another round of murmurs, every pair of eyes on him. He could feel their judgment, their dismissal, their betrayal, and it burned through him like fire. He knew they'd made their decision, but he would never go down

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without a fight. He'd come too far to give up this easily. He'd bled for the company just as much as they did and refused to be dismissed unjustly because of the said rumors.

"You think this is right?" His voice lowered, breaking at the edges but with an undeniable sharpness. "You think this is something you can just decide?"

The older man met Hunter's blazing eyes with a cold smirk. "I'm sure your father agrees with us."

The mention of his father brought a new wave of bitterness surging through Hunter's chest. Of course, his father was there. How could he forget that? Hunter's gaze flickered toward his father, Paul, who had been sitting quietly throughout the entire exchange. He was slouched back in his chair, arms crossed, eyes cold and detached. Hunter could imagine he loved every second of his struggle. He knew his father had been waiting for this moment. He had pushed him toward a wall with no escape, hoping he'd come crawling back for help. But no. Hunter wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

"I agree," Paul said, his voice calm and emotionless.

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Hunter's head snapped toward his father, eyes wide with disbelief. *What?* His throat tightened, and for a second, he couldn't breathe. *Did he just agree?*

He'd expected manipulation, sure. Threats. But

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outright dismissal? No, he hadn't expected that. Was this one of his father's sick ways to prove how little power Hunter really had?

Paul straightened in his seat, his gaze meeting Hunter's blazing one. "I apologize for my son's... irresponsibility." His words cut through the air like a knife. "He's indeed worked hard for this



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company, as well as everyone, but personal issues have no place in business. We've all put too much effort into growing this enterprise to let it be torn apart by something so trivial. I agree with the board's decision. My son will have to step down."

Hunter's hands trembled, gripping the table until his knuckles turned white. The surrounding murmurs faded, replaced by the rush of blood in his ears. "*Did he say trivial?*" Hunter scoffed in disbelief.

In his twisted, selfish way, Paul had just spelt it out to Hunter—that he still had control over him, despite how hard Hunter had fought to break free. But his father had just proven how powerless and futile Hunter's stubbornness was with one word. He had shown that he could take anything from Hunter with a single word.

What was even funnier was that all those years of trying to prove himself, of fighting his father's greed with his stubbornness, had been a waste. Wasn't it? Carla, the woman he chose, wasn't the person he thought she was. The company, the one he had spent sleepless nights working for to prove he could do things without his father, had just been snatched from his fingers, and he had no power whatsoever to fight back. How hilarious

could that be?

His body trembled, and without warning, a sharp laugh escaped his lips as he fell into his chair. It was bitter, almost manic. He couldn't stop it, even as the shareholders turned to look at him in confusion.

Paul's gaze locked on Hunter, cold and angry as Hunter laughed. The rest of the shareholders glanced between them, clearly uncomfortable, and soon they started to leave, not without glancing at Hunter, who was still laughing, shaking their heads.

"Are you going to continue laughing like a maniac, or have you finally realized the mess you've made?" Paul's sharp voice sliced through Hunter's laughter immediately after the last shareholder left the room.

Hunter wiped the corner of his mouth, still chuckling under his breath. "This is rich, really rich." He leaned back in his chair, his smile replaced with a smirk. "You mean the mess you orchestrated, right? Come on, let's not pretend this wasn't exactly what you wanted, because we both know this is exactly what you wanted all along." His demeanour shifted, and he leaned forward in his chair, the vein in his neck popping out as he

jabbed furiously at the table and bellowed, "To watch me fail! To make sure your son crumbles at your feet like a good little puppet!"

Paul folded his arms, his face impassive. "I didn't force you to make a fool of yourself, son. That's all on you."

"Oh, right," Hunter sneered, sitting up straighter and staring his father down. "Because you've been such a great example of how to live a dignified life."

"Watch your tone!"

"Or what? You think I don't see it? The only thing that matters to you is power. Estelle, this company—it was never about family. It was about making sure you stayed on top. You're so desperate to win that you're willing to see me torn down just to prove you were right all along."

"Stop whining about your failures and take responsibility for once," Paul sneered, "This isn't about me, Hunter. This is about your inability to manage your own life. You've ruined everything, despite my warnings about that Carla woman from the start. So the only person to blame here is you."

Hunter cut him off, his voice rising with anger. "



Don't you dare put this on me! You pushed me into this mess with your ridiculous demands, your obsession with Estelle, and your thirst for power."

"And where is that Estelle I pushed you to?" Paul mocked and Hunter clenched his fists, but Paul continued, his voice dripping with mockery. "Estelle's with Ryan now. You saw that, didn't you? She doesn't need you anymore. She's smarter than you think, Hunter. She's moved on, and she's doing just fine with a man who's everything you couldn't be."

The words hit Hunter harder than he expected, like a sharp twist of the knife in his gut. Unconsciously, his mind flashed back to seeing Estelle and Ryan together—the way she seemed lighter, freer, and happier with him. His throat tightened, and he clenched his fists, but he wasn't about to let Paul see him crumble.

"And Carla?" Paul added with a cruel smile. "Oh, she's doing a fine job ruining whatever's left of your reputation. So tell me, son, power and greed aside, did I cause the mess you've made of your life?"

Hunter's jaw clenched, his fists curling at his sides, refusing to accept the mess was his entire fault. The image of Estelle and Ryan together

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flashed in his mind once again and his nose flared with anger.

"You think you've won, don't you?" Hunter spat, his eyes blazing with fury. "You think you've taken everything from me. But you haven't. You'll never have the one thing you want the most."

Paul arched a brow, genuinely puzzled by the sudden shift in the conversation. "And what's that?"

Hunter leaned forward with his hands resting on the table, his voice shaking with rage. "My loyalty. I'll never be your puppet, no matter how much you try to control me. I'd rather lose everything than be like you."

For a moment, Paul just stared at Hunter with an unreadable expression. He sat there for a minute before adjusting his suit jacket, his lips curling into a cruel smile as he stood up.

"If you say so, son. If you say so."



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