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45.

"Yet another shocking, infuriating revelation to sour the day, as if the weight of this heartache wasn't already unbearable."

"Where were you all?" Christian bellowed, his voice raw with anger, echoing through the room. The loud c**k of the table he had just slammed reverberated, causing the officers and everyone else to flinch. His eyes darted toward the security men from Estelle's company, who stood by the wall, heads bowed in shame.

They had just finished watching the footage of Estelle being dragged out of the camera's view. The sound of Anna's muffled sobs pierced the room, and people which consisted of the policemen, and the security teams shifted uncomfortably in their respective positions.

"Tell me how that happened! On your watch!" Christian jabbed his finger through the air, pointing at the trembling guards. "You're supposed to keep that building secure. You're supposed to ensure the safety of everyone working in the company, and yet you allowed this to happen—my daughter dragged out like a damn sack of potatoes!" His

45.

hand slammed the table again and again as he spoke, his rage palpable. "Where was your vigilance? Where were your eyes?"

His anger radiated through the room, as the officers exchanged uneasy glances.

"Arrest them!" he demanded. "Every one of them. I want them held accountable until my daughter is found."

"Mr. Brown," the lead officer began cautiously, "I understand your frustration, but our priority is finding your daughter. We need to focus on tracking her down before we address the security lapses."

Christian glared, his lips curling in irritation, and just as he was about to respond, Anna's voice broke through, soft and filled with desperation.

"Just... find her, please," she begged, her voice cracking as tears spilt down her cheeks. "Just... find my daughter."

Christian swallowed, his fists clenched, his glare burning, but he didn't say a word. The officers nodded and moved swiftly to take statements from everyone in the room. Amid the chaos and desperation, Ryan stood motionless by the window, completely detached from the scene

45.

unfolding around him. His mind was miles away, trapped in an endless pit of self-blame.

It's my fault. She's missing because of me.

His stomach twisted as he replayed the events over and over. He had promised to drive her home, then kissed her, and then left. He had been so shaken by his own feelings that he drove off, leaving Estelle vulnerable. And now, she was gone, to God knows where. And it was all his fault.

If I hadn't kissed her... if I hadn't left her... she would be here.

The guilt gnawed at him, threatening to consume him. He cursed himself silently, clenching and unclenching his fists at his sides, unable to meet anyone's gaze. How could he, when he could feel their judging eyes even if they weren't looking at him? They had all seen the footage—the kiss, and how he had left like a damn coward. He knew it was only a matter of time before Christian directed his rage at him.

"Mr. Hayes?" A voice startled him out of his thoughts. A policeman stood before him, clipboard in hand, his expression calm but firm. "We need your statement."

Ryan swallowed hard and nodded as he reached

for the clipboard, but his hand trembled. His thoughts were so clouded with guilt that writing the statement felt impossible. He hadn't even begun when the door suddenly swung open with a deafening crash.

"Where the hell is she?" All eyes snapped toward the entrance as Hunter stormed in, his face twisted with rage. "Where the hell is Estelle?" he bellowed, marching forward, fists clenched, his entire body radiating fury. His eyes darted around the room, ignoring everyone until they finally landed on Ryan. "You!" he hissed, striding toward him.

"You've got to be kidding me," Ethan growled, rising from his seat and stepping toward Hunter. "What the hell are you doing—"

But Hunter wasn't having it. He shoved Ethan aside with a hard push, his eyes locked on Ryan like a predator zeroing in on its prey. "I knew it," Hunter spat.

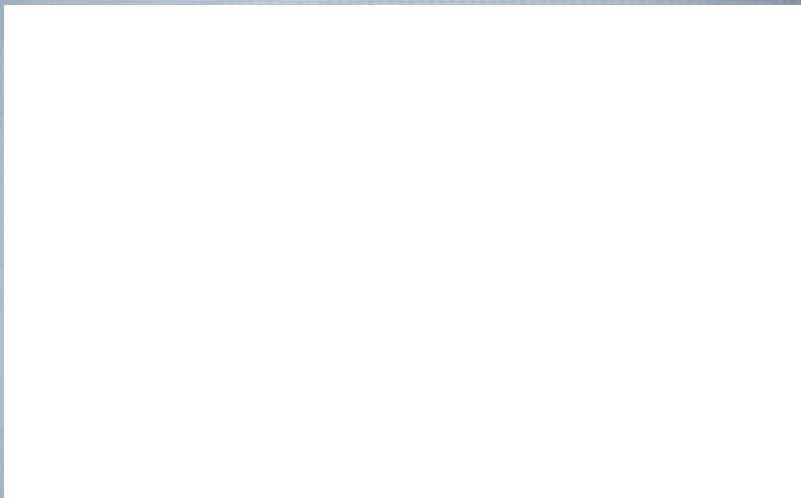
Ryan, still holding the clipboard, didn't flinch. He regarded Hunter's advancing figure with a bored look. He wasn't in the mood for this, not now—not with Estelle missing.

"I knew you had something up your sleeve, you

45.

piece of—” With a wild swing of his fist, Hunter punched Ryan square in the jaw as soon as he got close. The force of it sent Ryan staggering back, his head snapping to the side, the clipboard clattering to the floor.

Gasps filled the room, but Ryan quickly regained



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his balance despite the pain radiating through his face.

“Stop it, Hunter!” someone demanded, but Hunter shoved Ethan and a few officers aside again as they tried to intervene, lunging at Ryan once more.

“You think I don’t know what’s going on? Do you

45.

really believe I can't see it? You've been sneaking around Estelle for months, acting like the nice guy and waiting for your chance! You knew she was vulnerable, and you took advantage of that. You—"

Ryan had had enough. He wiped the blood from his lips and, without warning, swung back, landing a hard punch on Hunter's cheek, pouring all his pent-up anger into the blow. Hunter stumbled back, the impact knocking the air out of him.

The fight escalated. Now seething with uncontained rage, Hunter lunged at Ryan again, but this time the security men intervened, pulling him back. He struggled against them, his muscles straining as he tried to break free, his eyes locked on Ryan.

"You bastard!" Hunter yelled, fighting against the men holding him. "You think you're so righteous, don't you? You think you can just step in and take over? I knew it, Ryan. I knew something was off about you!"

Ryan didn't move, didn't react. Instead, he stood there, watching Hunter struggle with a cold, emotionless smirk. It was disheartening that Hunter seemed more concerned about him than about Estelle. "Is this really what you're worried about right now?" he asked, his voice dripping

45.

with disdain. "Your ego? While Estelle is missing?"

"Enough!" Christian's voice boomed across the room, silencing everyone. His face was red with fury, his fists clenched at his sides.

He had intentionally kept quiet when Hunter entered, watching the bullheaded i***t pounce around his home like he owned it, attacking the other bullheaded man he was still thinking about how to deal with later. His glare flickered from Ryan to Hunter.

"Tell me, Hunter," he started in a calm but tight voice. "What business do you have here?"

Hunter, still breathing heavily, glared at Christian. He jerked his hand free. "What business do I have here? I have every right to be here, just like everyone else in this room."

Christian's eyes narrowed. "And why is that?"

"Because she's still my wife."

The words hung in the air, the silence deafening, making Ryan's muttering of "Ex-wife" louder than intended.

Hunter shot Ryan a deadly glare, while Christian and the others regarded Hunter like he was insane. "Last I checked, you and my daughter were done.

45.

Divorced. So, how come she's still your wife? I'm interested, please."

Hunter clenched his jaw as he met Christian's calm yet intense gaze. He swallowed hard, as if weighing his words, and for a moment, uncertainty flickered across his face. Finally, he opened his mouth and said, "Because I didn't sign the divorce documents."

The room went deathly silent. Anna gasped, her hand flying to her mouth in shock. Ethan's eyes widened with disbelief. Even the rest of the people in the room froze, their eyes darting between each other, trying to process the bombshell that had just been dropped.

Christian straightened up, his eyes unreadable. He assessed Hunter for a long moment before saying, "If you're done with this nonsense, get out of my house so my family and I can focus on finding my daughter."

Hunter opened his mouth to argue, but before he could speak, the officers stepped in, pulling him back. Anger flashed in his eyes, but he gave in, turning toward the door with a final, hateful glare at Ryan.

The door slammed shut behind him, and the room

45.

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fell into an uneasy silence once more.



21

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