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*If karma existed, then it was surely a master at meddling in his life, orchestrating every misstep, every downfall with a cruel precision. It was as if it took delight in watching him unravel, pulling the*

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*strings on his mistakes, magnifying every wrong choice until they became a web he could no longer escape.*

Hunter couldn't tell how long he'd been standing in his office, staring at the divorce papers he hadn't

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even known existed until a few hours ago. His mind replayed the moment he uttered those words—words he couldn't shake off: "*Because she's still my wife.*" The memory clawed at his brain, sinking painfully into his heart.

Until that moment, he had assumed their divorce was finalized. They hadn't talked about taking it to court, and frankly, they had drifted so far apart after everything that happened, that no one even thought about confirming the papers. It felt like an afterthought. Yet, when Christian asked what business he had in his house, a surge of possessiveness overtook him, and he claimed Estelle as his wife once again, without a second thought. He winced, replaying the moment over and over. It wasn't planned. It just slipped out. And yet, as soon as he said it, it felt like a weight lifted off his chest. It felt... right. But the fact that it felt right was what scared him the most. His emotions had been all over the place lately—jealousy, guilt, fear. It was too much to even think straight.

He groaned, leaning against his desk, gripping its edge so tightly his knuckles whitened. How did things get so complicated? First, jealousy had gnawed at him when he saw Estelle and Ryan together. Then, his world spiraled out of control when he found out she was missing. His initial

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reaction had been anger—anger that she allowed Ryan into her life, anger at the way Ryan kissed her so openly, so brazenly—like she was his to claim. His jaw tightened at the thought.

Yet, when he saw the footage of Estelle being dragged away, limp and helpless, the fury drained out of him. All that remained was fear. Pure, raw fear. He had never known such terror in his life. The thought of losing her—truly losing her this time—sent icy tendrils of panic through his veins. His grip on the desk tightened, and for a moment, he could hardly breathe.

He needed to find her. He needed to find Estelle, quickly, for his sanity.

His body trembled, and it took all his restraint not to burst into tears from how terrified he was. It was that bastard's fault. None of this would have happened if it weren't for him. *Ryan*. His emotions switched to anger, and his grip on the desk tightened as he recalled Ryan's smug face at Estelle's home. He never trusted him—not at all. Something about him always felt off, and now, with Estelle missing, Hunter's suspicion only grew. But how was he supposed to figure this out? He didn't even know where to start.

Just then, the door to his office creaked open,

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breaking his spiralling thoughts. Mara peeked in, her small head poking through the gap in the doorway. Her wide, innocent eyes blinked up at him, waiting for permission to enter.

His heart softened instantly, and a smile crept across his face despite the turmoil within him. The little girl took the smile as an invitation and skipped into the room with her pigtails bouncing.

"Daddy," she called sweetly, wrapping her arms around his leg in a hug, her tiny frame pressing into him.

Hunter knelt to her level, running his fingers through her soft hair. "Hi, baby," he whispered, pulling her close. Mara, his little girl, was the one thing in his life that still made sense. She was the only thing he had ever gotten right, the one person who brought happiness and pride into his messed-up life. His love for her was pure and untainted. She was his everything, and he would do anything to keep her safe.

"How was school today?" he asked, lifting her chin gently so their eyes met.

"It was good! I ate all my lunch!" she declared proudly, beaming at him.

Hunter chuckled softly. To her, that was an

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accomplishment. "Good job, baby. I'm proud of you," he said, kissing her head. "And because you were so good, I'll make you a special treat."

"Really?" Mara beamed, her smile contagious.

"Yes, really," Hunter mimicked, pinching her cheeks as he stood up. But then, the door swung open with a loud bang, making both their heads snap toward it. Carla strutted into the room, dressed in one of her high-end outfits, the sound of her heels echoing in the office.

Hunter's mood shifted instantly. The smile he was wearing turned into a scowl. "Mara," he said softly, his eyes still on Carla, "why don't you head upstairs for a bit? I'll give you your treat later, okay?"

"Promise?" Mara asked, extending her pinky finger toward him, her head tilted to the side.

Hunter couldn't help but smile as he linked his much larger pinky with hers. "I promise."

With that, Mara scurried out of the room, her tiny feet pattering down the hall. "Walk, Mara," he called after her, but she didn't slow down. Once her footsteps faded, Hunter sighed and turned his attention back to the papers scattered across his desk. He took his seat, ignoring Carla, who was

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now staring at him with an expression that could only be described as livid.

“What the hell did you do to my credit card?”

Carla’s voice cut through the room like a sharp blade.

Hunter didn’t respond. He concentrated on flipping through the pages of the document in front of him. His patience for Carla had worn thin long ago, and today wouldn’t be an exception—especially when he needed all his focus.

“I asked you a question, Hunter!” Carla snapped, her voice rising in pitch as she stormed closer.

With a resigned sigh, Hunter finally looked up, meeting her angry gaze. “Yes, I cut you off,” he said plainly, leaning back in his chair. “I canceled the credit card.”

Carla’s jaw dropped, her face flushing with shock and fury. “What?! You can’t just—”

“Oh, I can,” Hunter interrupted coldly, his voice laced with disdain. “I’m done funding your drinking habits and frivolous shopping sprees. You’ve contributed nothing meaningful to my life, Carla, and I refuse to keep wasting my money on you.”

Carla’s jaw dropped, clearly not expecting such

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bluntness. Her face turned red, and she spluttered, struggling to form words. With what seemed like all her might, she spat, "You bastard!" The veins on her neck strained as she took a threatening step forward, her hands clenched at her sides. "You

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think you can just cut me off like that? I'm the mother of your child! That's a whole damn contribution to your withered life!" she shrieked.

Hunter scoffed, unmoved by her words. "And what, exactly, does that have to do with you draining money from me? Mara is my responsibility, not your lavish lifestyle."

He turned back to the documents on his desk, pretending to skim through them. He knew she would go into one of her tirades about being the mother of his child, how she'd borne the weight without his presence. It used to work—he respected that, and he still did—but her emotional blackmail no longer worked on him. Especially not now, when he didn't have the energy to spare for an argument.

Carla's nose flared with fury, her chest heaving as her tantrum seemed to bounce off the shield Hunter had built around himself. Her eyes darted to the documents he was pretending to read. In a fit of frustration, she snatched the papers from his desk, holding them up like a weapon. "You want to play games, Hunter? Then watch me tear apart what seems so important to you—watch me destroy everything precious in your damn life! Or rectify my credit card!"

Alarm flashed through Hunter, and he shot up from his chair, reaching for the papers. "Carla, don't!"

"Undo whatever you did to my card now," she shrieked, raising the papers.

"Carla, drop that!"

"Do it now!" she screamed again, her hands



poised to tear the paper, and Hunter lunged at her.

They struggled, but in the midst of it, Carla's eyes skimmed over the document, and she froze. Her gaze locked on the white sheet littered with black text.

Her expression shifted—first to disbelief, then to hurt, and finally to cold fury as she read the content. “A divorce?” she whispered, her voice trembling with disbelief. Her gaze blazed with fury when she met Hunter's eyes. “You've been sitting on this, this whole time?”

Hunter swallowed hard, unsure of what to say. He hadn't planned for her to find out this way. He hadn't even realized the paper she grabbed was the divorce document.

Carla's face contorted with rage. “You never signed it,” she hissed, throwing the papers back onto the desk. “You still haven't signed it! You... you were never going to leave her, were you?”

Hunter stared at her, his throat tightening. “Carla, it's complicated—”

“Carla, it's not like that!” Hunter shouted, his patience finally snapping. “You don't understand—”

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"No, I do understand," she cut him off, her voice cold and trembling with fury. "You're still in love with her. You're still her husband, and I'm just... nothing. I don't know why I didn't see this earlier. I don't know why I thought you could ever truly want me. I'm just a second choice, a tool in your love story. Just like before."

Hunter clenched his fists, unable to respond, the weight of her words pressing down on him. There was nothing to say. There was no reason or explanation to counter her claim because even he couldn't comprehend what he was feeling any longer.

"I see I'm right," Carla spat, taking Hunter's silence as confirmation. With one last furious glare, she turned and stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind her, leaving Hunter alone with his thoughts and the mess he created.

He stood still, staring blankly at the shut door, his emotions churning inside him, with guilt, regret, and confusion crashing against one another like waves. It seemed there was nothing in his life that worked perfectly. If karma existed, then it was surely meddling in his business and seemed to enjoy every bit of his mess. His gaze flickered to the divorce papers scattered on the desk.

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Yes, karma must be enjoying every bit of the mess he created.



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