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*When a friend becomes an enemy, the soul fractures in silent agony. The laughter shared turns to echoes, haunting the heart's fragile walls. You wonder, endlessly, what shadow crept in to poison the bond, What seed of hatred was sown where trust once bloomed so brightly. Each memory feels like a dagger, its edge dulled only by time, Yet the wound festers with questions—why? How could they Did I fail you, or did you grow weary of our shared light? The answers never come, only the ache of knowing love turned to ash. And so, you carry the weight of confusion, heavier than hatred itself.*

Hunter's lips pressed into a thin line, his jaw clenched as he stormed out of the office building. Normally, the sight of it - a structure he had meticulously designed - would fill him with pride. It was a testament to his hard work, a symbol of his success. But tonight, the usual satisfaction eluded him. Instead, a dark cloud hung over him, his mood sour, and his thoughts disturbed.

He gripped his phone tightly, glaring at the screen in both confusion and irritation as Ryan's call

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appeared again. The call ended without him answering, and for a moment, he considered throwing the phone. Maybe that would ease his mood but he knew that was far from it.

"What the hell does he want?" Hunter muttered under his breath. He and Ryan had never been on terms that warranted personal calls. They barely exchanged words unless absolutely necessary, which was rare. For Ryan to call him repeatedly, knowing this, was strange. Curiosity flickered in the back of his mind, but he dismissed it. He didn't have the energy to deal with Ryan - not after the day he'd had.

He sighed heavily, his shoulders stiff as he replayed the events of the day. He had lost billions in a deal he'd been certain was flawless. The sting of failure gnawed at him, but it was the unexpected news from their family lawyer that delivered the hardest blow.

Hours earlier, their family lawyer had delivered the news that made his blood boil. His father, Paul, had withdrawn Hunter's name from the family trust.

Hunter had expected this - he knew his father well enough to anticipate such a move - but hearing it confirmed still felt like a slap in the face. Paul had

always dangled his wealth like a carrot on a string, using it to manipulate and control, and Hunter had thought he was prepared, that he wouldn't care when it finally happened. But the sting of betrayal hurt more than he expected. And it was done specifically on a day like that; as if mocking his failure.

Shaking his head, he pushed the thought away and made his way to the sleek black car waiting at the curb. His driver, a tall, stoic man in his late thirties, opened the door with a polite bow. "Good evening, sir."

Hunter grunted in acknowledgment and was about to slide in when his phone buzzed in his pocket again.

"What now?" he groaned, assuming it was Ryan again. *What the hell does the dude want from him?*

He pulled his phone out of his side pocket, ready to say something rude to Ryan, only for his brow to furrow deeply. The message wasn't from Ryan - it was from Dave.

Hunter frowned. It was strange. Dave rarely reached out unless Hunter initiated contact, and their discussions were usually quick calls. His

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relationship with Dave was complicated at best. Dave was more his father's loyal follower than his friend, which strained their interactions. Yet Hunter still found himself trusting Dave with certain matters. Even so, it was odd for Dave to send him anything. Could it be a message from Paul?

Frowning, he slid into the car, nodding for the driver to shut the door and start the engine. As the car began to move, he tapped on the file attachment Dave had sent, and the moment the images loaded on his screen, his blood turned to ice.

"Stop the car!" Hunter's shout was so loud that the driver slammed on the brakes, sending the car lurching forward violently.

The images on his phone stared back at him, vivid and horrifying. Estelle was tied to a chair, unconscious, her head slumped. She looked utterly defenseless, completely at the mercy of whoever had taken the photos.

*What is this?*

Hunter's heart pounded in his chest, his breathing uneven as his mind jumbled to make sense of what he was seeing. He barely noticed the startled look his driver was giving him through the mirror.

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Hunter rechecked the sender's name, his brow furrowed in confusion. But it was Dave.

"What's happening?" he whispered to himself, his voice shaky. *"Why would Dave have these? What's he doing with Estelle like that?"*

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His phone buzzed again. This time, it was a text. With dread pooling in his stomach, he opened it.

*"If you want her alive, come alone."*

Hunter froze, the weight and complication of the words pressing down on him like a rock. His mind raced with different possibilities.

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"This has to be a prank," he muttered, his voice barely audible, his stomach trembling. "It has to be." But deep down, he knew it wasn't. Dave wouldn't joke about this, and Estelle didn't look like she was joking either.

Swallowing hard, and with a shaky finger, he dialed Dave's number. He pressed the phone to his ear, praying that somehow this was all a misunderstanding, all a trick.

The line connected, and Dave's voice flowed through, calm and confident. "Hunter," he said, his tone filled with amusement that sent a chill down Hunter's spine. "I see you received my message."

"Dave," Hunter's voice broke slightly, betraying his fear. "What the hell is this? What are you doing with Estelle?!"

Dave chuckled, a sound that sent chills down Hunter's spine. "Isn't it obvious?" Hunter's brow furrowed in confusion but Dave wasn't done. "Come save her, alone. Or don't. It's entirely up to you."

Hunter's grip tightened on the phone, his knuckles white at the seriousness in Dave's tone. "You're insane if you think—"

Dave cut him off, his tone menacing. "Tick tock,

Hunter. Every second you waste is a second closer to her death."

The call ended with a sharp beep.

Hunter sat frozen for a moment, the phone still pressed to his ear. His chest heaved as panic set in, his mind a whirlwind of emotions - fear, confusion, desperation.

"Sir?" the driver asked hesitantly.

Hunter didn't respond. He yanked the door open and stepped out of the car, shoving his phone into his pocket.

"Get out," he ordered, his tone sharp.

The driver blinked in confusion. "Sir, is something —"

"Get out!" Hunter barked.

The man quickly complied, stepping onto the roadside as Hunter slid into the driver's seat. Without another word, Hunter slammed the door, started the car, and took off like a madman, leaving the driver standing there, bewildered.

The tires screeched as Hunter sped down the road, weaving recklessly through the traffic. His thoughts were a chaotic mess.

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+5 Points

Estelle. The image of her bound and helpless haunted him, fueling his panic. What happened? How had it gone into that and why would Dave do something so heinous?

He gritted his teeth, gripping the wheel so tightly his knuckles ached as those questions swirl in his mind. "Damn it, Dave," he muttered.

The speedometer climbed as he pushed the car to its limits, the engine roaring. The road blurred as he raced past cars and an emergency vehicle attending to an accident. His mind replayed Dave's voice, the chilling finality of his words. He wasn't joking - Hunter knew that. But what he didn't understand was why. Was Dave the person behind Estelle's attacks?

His heart raced, his pulse pounding in his ears as he neared Dave's house. Hunter wasn't sure what he'd find when he got there. He wasn't even sure what he would do. But one thing was clear: he wouldn't leave without Estelle. Never.

The car came to a screeching halt in front of Dave's house, and Hunter marched toward the building, which seemed more menacing with each step he took. His body shook with fear, doubts creeping in. He should have called the police. If Dave really meant what he said, there was no



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guarantee even Hunter would make it out alive. But he remembered Dave's warning and pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind.

He swallowed hard and glanced up at the shielded window but noticed no movement. He swallowed back his nervousness and wiped his sweaty hand on his trousers before raising it to press the doorbell. However, before he could, the door swung open, startling him. Before Hunter could gather himself, something hit him hard on the head, and he slumped unconscious on the floor like a sack of potatoes.



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