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*Could you look at what you've done? Every tear, every scream, every drop of blood spilt in anguish. It all bears your mark, a legacy carved from greed and pride. You built this chaos, brick by brick, lie by lie. Chasing power, sacrificing love, ignoring the hearts you crushed. What burns now isn't just pain, it's the fire you lit yourself. And every flicker, every ember, whispers your name in blame. You turned love into a battlefield, and trust into a fragile shell. But tonight, as the wreckage lays bare before your eyes. Know this truth: it was all your doing, every shattered piece.*

"Hunter!" Estelle's scream tore through the air as Hunter's body jerked back, his chair crashing backwards from the force of the bullet. Blood immediately seeped through his shirt, staining it dark red.

"Hunter!" she screamed again, her voice raw with panic, her eyes wide with horror. She thrashed violently against her restraints, her gaze fixed on Hunter, who lay crumpled before her like a pile of useless wood.

Dave, on the other hand, stood frozen, his face

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pale as the gun slipped from his trembling fingers and clattered to the floor. His heart pounded wildly in his chest, his wide eyes glued to the growing pool of blood beneath Hunter's shirt. No... no. He hadn't meant to. He hadn't meant to pull the trigger and it had surprised him.

Hunter groaned loudly in agony, his head swinging from one side to the other as pain tore through his stomach and spread through every bone, muscle and organ in his body. It was like he had been set on fire with no escape.

"Do something, Dave!" Estelle's voice cracked as she struggled harder, her chair rattling against the floor. "Help him!"

"Untie me!"

But Dave couldn't move, nor was he listening. His body remained rooted, his limbs trembling. This wasn't supposed to happen, at least not like this. He had wanted to scare Hunter with the gun, to maintain control, but now everything had spiraled out of his control. The deafening sound of the gunshot, the spreading pool of blood, Estelle's screams, and the growing wail of sirens left him disoriented. It was as if all his senses of reasoning and control had left him. His chest heaved as panic clawed at him.



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"Dave!" Estelle screamed again, making Dave's head snap viciously toward her. "Help him, you i\*\*\*t!" Just then, her chair tipped, and she fell sideways with a thud. She yelped in pain as her head hit the floor, but she didn't stop thrashing, her tear-streaked face turned toward Hunter, who groaned weakly.

Dave watched in anger as Estelle tried to free herself in that awkward position, crying her eyes out. The sound of her cries only added to the panic in his chest.

"Untie me, you bastard! He's bleeding out!" Estelle screamed again.

"Shut the f\*\*k up!" Dave snapped. He glared at Estelle before dragging a hand through his hair, pacing back and forth as he tried to think. However, the noises made thinking impossible. He let out an animalistic groan. This wasn't the plan. This wasn't supposed to happen. He had a perfect plan, and this wasn't it. Losing control and making a mess of everything hadn't been part of it. He tugged his hair harder, his pacing frantic. The sirens grew louder, and he knew he had to act fast. There was no way he would spend the rest of his life in prison without getting his father the justice he deserved.

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He whirled around, his eyes darting about, his mind racing for a plan.

"Dave, please," Estelle begged, her voice sounding weaker now.

His eyes met hers, then darted to Hunter, whose groans were growing fainter. For a moment, Dave hesitated. But when the sirens grew deafening, his panic took charge. With a low growl, he bolted for the back exit, his footsteps fading as Estelle screamed after him.

Hunter, on the other hand, exhaled slowly, his head weakly resting back against the floor. His vision blurred, his thoughts hazy, but one thing was clear to him. If this was his end, so be it. He had caused this - Dave's pain, Estelle's pain, everything was his fault. If only he hadn't been so consumed by his defiance against his father, so blinded by his need to prove himself. Maybe Dave would still have his father. He would still be with Estelle, enjoying their marriage, allowing himself to fully love her. Their baby, a boy or girl would be in their arms on a night like this, cuddled up as they slept. Maybe if he had acted rationally instead of like a brat, none of this would have happened. Estelle wouldn't be screaming his name in terror, and Dave wouldn't be a runaway criminal. Perhaps this was the

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punishment he deserved.

"Hunter," Estelle's voice dragged him back. Hunter blinked, weakly turning his head slightly toward her. Despite the searing pain in his stomach and

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his awkward position, he managed a faint, pained smile. "Don't cry, Estelle," he murmured. "Please, don't cry."

"How can you say that?" she shouted, tears streaming down her face. "How can you tell me not to cry when you're bleeding to death in front of me?" She thrashed again, ignoring the strain on her body, her chair scraping against the floor. "

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God, I can't even stop the bleeding! If only I could get free from this." she cried, her head lifting slightly as she stared helplessly at Hunter's blood-soaked shirt.

Hunter only managed a painful moan.

The sirens blared louder, signalling the police's final arrival. Moments later, the door burst open, and officers stormed in, weapons drawn, followed closely by paramedics. Estelle's cries for help filled the air.

"He's hurt! Someone help him!"

The officers swarmed the room, quickly cutting the ropes and binding them. Paramedics rushed to Hunter, assessing his injuries. Estelle clung to his hand, her fingers trembling, her knuckles white, refusing to let him go and not in the right mind to answer the police questions about Dave's whereabouts.

"Ma'am, we need space to work," a paramedic said urgently.

"No! I'm staying with him!" Estelle cried when they tried to usher her away. She clung to Hunter's hand as they lifted him onto a stretcher. "You're going to be okay," she whispered fiercely, her tears falling onto his face. "You have to be okay."

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Hunter groaned softly, his eyes fluttering open. "Stubborn as always," he murmured, his lips curving into a faint smile despite the agony etched across his face. Estelle ignored him.

By the time they reached the ambulance, Hunter's breathing had become laboured. One paramedic reached for an oxygen mask, but Hunter weakly shook his head.

"No..." he whispered.

"Hunter, please," Estelle pleaded, surprised by his refusal. Was he planning to die? "Let them help you! You need it."

His eyes, dull with pain, met hers, and for a moment, all the regret he carried poured out. "I'm sorry," he whispered, his voice cracking.

"Don't," she begged, shaking her head. "Don't talk. Save your strength."

But Hunter pressed on, his voice trembling with emotion. "I've done nothing but hurt you. From the beginning... I've put you in danger... pushed you away." His lips quivered. "I should have been better ... for you, for us. I should have been a good husband and father to you and our baby. I should have allowed myself to love you instead of fighting it, because of my childish urge to defy my



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father. And now..." He paused, a tear streaking down his face.

"Stop it!" Estelle sobbed, gripping his hand tighter.

"Just stop! You're making it worse!"

"I have to say it," he murmured, his voice barely audible. "I need you to know that I'm sorry for everything. I don't deserve forgiveness, but I needed to say it. I'm sorry. I am..."

Before he could finish, a violent cough wracked his body, blood spilling from his lips. Estelle's scream echoed in the ambulance, her voice raw with horror. She clapped a hand over her mouth, her eyes wide. The paramedics sprang into action, shouting orders as they worked frantically to stabilize him. Estelle was forced to let go of his hand, her sobs shaking her entire body.

When they arrived at the hospital, Estelle whispered through her tears, "Stay with me," gripping Hunter's hand as they wheeled him inside. But as soon as Hunter disappeared behind the emergency surgical room doors, Estelle collapsed to her knees, her sobs shaking her body.

Her tears blurred her vision as she clutched her face, the weight of everything -the shock - the fear - everything crushing her. She barely registered the



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presence of her parents and a few nurses passing, nor the sound of the door bursting open as Paul stormed in with a frightened Sarah trailing behind.

"What did you do now?" Paul bellowed, his voice booming with anger. He suddenly reached for Estelle and roughly pulled her to her feet. "Why is it that wherever you go, trouble follows? My son\_\_"

"Get your hands off her!" Christian snapped, stepping forward and pulling his daughter out of Paul's grasp. His voice was sharp, his fists clenched. "How dare you blame her? Your son is in there fighting for his life, and all you care about is pointing fingers?"

"Do not tell me how to handle my son's situation\_\_"

"Enough!" Estelle's voice rang out, silencing them. She stood there, hunched with her tear-soaked face blazing with fury. For a while, she had sat there, her mind in chaos. It was hard to piece together everything that had happened that night. The image of Hunter's blood and the moment they almost lost him wouldn't leave her mind. Yet all they could do was argue. For real?

Paul turned to her, his mouth thinning in anger at her interruption. "How dare..."

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"This is your fault," Estelle spat, cutting him off, her voice trembling with emotion. She met Paul's gaze with the same amount of fury and hatred. "What happened tonight? Every bit of it... is because of your greed. It was all your doing!"


Her words hung in the silence, leaving everyone stunned. Paul stood still, his face showing shock and anger, but Estelle's blazing gaze remained steady on his. Her hands balled into fists, her chest rising and falling as the impact of her words sank in further.



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