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*She didn't know the destination, but the path ahead felt lighter than the weight she'd carried for years. For once, she wasn't running toward anyone or away from anything - she was simply walking for herself. The chaos that had consumed her heart no longer defined her steps. Each moment felt like a quiet rebellion against the pain she had endured. She wasn't certain of the future, but she was certain of her worth. Leaving behind the noise, she embraced the solace of her own company. Her scars whispered stories, but they no longer screamed her fears. Freedom wasn't just about escaping - it was about reclaiming. And though the road was uncertain, she knew this choice was hers alone. For the first time, that was enough.*

Estelle stood in the middle of her room, her heart heavy as she scanned the space. Her suitcase, the last of her bags, lay open on the bed, its zipper halfway undone as though it, too, didn't want to leave. Her gaze swept over the room she had called her own for years, now feeling both foreign and filled with memories.

The light from the window poured in softly, illuminating every corner of the room, but it did nothing to brighten the brooding mood within. Estelle exhaled slowly and reached for the suitcase. Her hand hovered over it for a moment before she firmly zipped it shut.

*It's time*, she thought to herself, her heart firm with determination but heavy with quiet sadness.

Her parents had always supported her decision to leave; it was their wish, except for her mother, who somehow couldn't let her go.. Well, because she would be all by herself. However, after everything that had happened - from Hunter's injury to Ryan's accident and the unbearable weight of the drama surrounding her, intensified once more by the press - her mother had finally relented. She had allowed Estelle to take a step back and find herself again.

"You deserve peace, my love," her mother had finally said after countless words of affirmation, tears welling in her eyes. "Don't let anyone make you feel guilty for choosing yourself."

Estelle had nodded, grateful yet filled with guilt. Was it selfish to leave when so much remained unresolved? She shook the thought away. This wasn't about running - it was about healing and



letting go of things.

Downstairs, her parents waited. Her mother, Anna, paced the living room, wringing her hands as though trying to find the right words. When Estelle appeared at the top of the staircase, suitcase in hand, her father, Christian, looked up and gave her an encouraging nod, while her brother met her halfway to collect the suitcase.

Anna's composure cracked the moment Estelle reached the bottom step. She pulled her daughter into a tight embrace, her tears falling freely now.

"I know this is what you need," Anna said through her sobs. "But I'll miss you so much. Promise me you'll call often."

"I will, Mom," Estelle whispered, her voice cracking. "I promise."

Christian placed a comforting hand on his wife's shoulder. "Let her go, Anna. She'll be back when she's ready." Although he looked calm, Estelle could tell her father felt exactly as her mother did. He just believed a man should keep his emotions hidden, which Estelle usually found brave.

Anna reluctantly released Estelle, wiping her tears with the side of her sleeve. "Take care of yourself, Estelle. And remember, no matter what, we're here

for you."

"I know," Estelle replied with a faint smile. "Thank you for everything."

As she stepped out of the house, the cool air hit her, and for a moment, she hesitated. She glanced back at her parents, her heart tugging at the thought of leaving the only constant in her chaotic life. But she pushed forward, knowing this was the right choice.

The car ride to the airport was a blur of passing streets and muted thoughts. Ethan, too, was quiet beside her, his eyes fixated on the road as he drove. Estelle's mind wandered to the two men who had unknowingly shaped her recent life experiences: Ryan and Hunter.

Ryan had woken up, she'd heard. She had wanted to visit him again, to thank him properly for risking his life to save her twice, but his friend's harsh words echoed in her mind: "*Don't show your face here again.*" She didn't know what she'd done to warrant such hostility and she knew that shouldn't have been the reason to stay away, but she just couldn't bring herself to face Ryan, hence using his friend's hostility as an excuse. However, she hoped Ryan would understand her absence and forgive her, even if his friend did not.



73.

As for Hunter, he remained unconscious, though his condition was now stable. Despite everything between them, she found herself wishing for his recovery. He deserved a chance to make things right - not just with her but with himself.

Her thoughts grew heavier as the car pulled into the airport. Ethan, who had stubbornly chosen to drive her there only to remain completely mute the entire time, helped her with her luggage.

The terminal was bustling with activity, families hugging one another goodbye, others rushing toward the checkpoints, and the soft hum of announcements echoing through the air. Estelle and Ethan moved through the crowd, making their way to the security checkpoint. Estelle's parent had tried to convince her to use the family private jet but she had refused. She needed the crowd and distraction a private won't offer.

When it was time to board, she and Ethan said their goodbyes. It was brief but emotional, as Ethan tried to hide the tears in his eyes. After that, Estelle didn't look back as she completed all necessary procedures and stepped onto the jet bridge, her heart pounding with each step. The moment she entered the aeroplane cabin, she felt an odd sense of relief and unease. She found her

73.

seat by the window, tucked her bag under it, and fastened her seatbelt.

As the plane began to lift into the sky, Estelle gazed out the window, watching as the familiar

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landscape of her hometown slipped away. For the first time in a long time, she allowed herself to breathe. There was no more noise, no more drama, just the quiet hum of the aeroplane and the promise of a fresh start.

Estelle closed her eyes, her thoughts swirling. She didn't know exactly where this journey would lead her, but she knew one thing for sure: she was

73.

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finally choosing herself, free from drama and pain.

And for now, that was enough.



6

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10

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*He had waited for this moment, enduring the weight of every wound, and as the chaos unfolded, he realized the pain had finally found its purpose, and the price had been worth it.*

On the other side of town, Sarah stood just outside Paul's office, located within their mansion whose walls were adorned with accolades, and the shelves stacked with books he never read but wanted people to think he had.

Sarah hesitated at the door for a moment. Her hands trembled as she clutched a brown folder, her heart thundering in her chest. She took a deep breath, mustering the courage she had lacked for years and stepped inside.

Paul was on the phone, his voice sharp and commanding. He didn't acknowledge her presence, though she knew he had seen her.

"Post his picture online," Paul barked into the receiver. "I don't care how you do it - just make sure Dave's face is plastered everywhere. I want him found before the launch. If he so much as breathes near my event, I'll make sure it's the last thing he does."



74.

Sarah felt a wave of disgust fluttering in her stomach. Even now, with his son lying in a hospital bed and still unconscious, Paul's mind was consumed by his precious business. His words were a punch to her already fragile heart. How had she coped with a man as sly and cold as Paul? She clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms to keep herself steady.

When he finally ended the call, Paul leaned back in his chair, his face twisted in irritation. Still, he didn't look at her.

"If you're here to waste my time, don't bother. I've got more important things to deal with," he said coldly, flipping through papers on his desk.

Sarah's patience snapped. "More important things?" Her voice rose before she could stop herself. "You mean your business? Do you even care? About Hunter? About anyone besides yourself?"

Paul's hand paused mid-motion, but he didn't look up. "Hunter will be fine. He always bounces back. Unlike some people, I don't coddle those who are supposed to be strong."

Sarah's heart constricted with pain, and her vision blurred with tears, but she refused to let them fall.

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"You're unbelievable," she muttered bitterly, her voice trembling with disdain. "Your son is in pain both physically and mentally. He hasn't even regained consciousness, and all you can think about is your stupid business and your revenge against Dave?"

Paul sighed dramatically, finally looking up at her. "If you have nothing useful to say, leave my office. I'm too busy for your dramatics, Sarah."

She marched toward him and slammed the file onto his desk, the sound echoing in the room. "Fine. If you're too busy, let me make this quick."

Paul's eyes narrowed, his brow arching as he picked up the file. His brows furrowed as he scanned the contents, his lips curling into a smirk when he realized what it was.

"A divorce?" he said, his voice dripping with disbelief. He tossed the papers back onto the desk and leaned back, crossing his arms. "I'll pretend I didn't see this and that you're upset and couldn't think straight because we both know you'll regret it tomorrow, Sarah. We both know that."

Sarah's voice cracked as her anger and frustration bubbled to the surface. "Regret? Do you mean



regret staying with you? Enduring years of your manipulation, your cruelty? Watching you tear apart everything good in this family while I stood by because I was too scared to leave? You think I'll regret leaving all that?" She shook her head, tears brimming in her eyes. "You've got no idea, Paul."

Paul's smirk faltered, but his voice remained cold and detached. "You're being emotional and it's embarrassing. Just go..."

"Emotional?" Sarah laughed bitterly, cutting him off mid-sentence, her tears finally spilling over. "You have no idea what it's like to be emotional, Paul. You don't feel anything - not for me, not for Hunter, not for anyone!" she screamed. Paul winced, rubbing his brow in frustration.

"Do you know what it's like to see your son cry himself to sleep and not be able to do anything about it because his father is too busy playing God? Do you know what it's like to swallow your pride and stay in a loveless marriage because you know you can't give your child the life he deserves on your own? You wouldn't because you're so selfish and only care about yourself!"

Paul's face hardened. "Yet you stayed," he mocked. "Why? Because this selfishness of mine



fed you and your ungrateful son." He bellowed.

"I stayed because I had no choice," Sarah bellowed back. Paul blinked in shock. Then she continued in a low, trembling voice, sharp with regret. "I stayed because my family was bankrupted, and I had nothing when I met you except the hope that you'd be the man I thought you were. But you weren't. You never were. I stayed for Hunter, for my son, because I didn't want him to suffer. Not because of what you brought to the table. But now?" She shook her head, her voice breaking. "Now, I realize I was wrong. Staying didn't protect him. It only hurt him more."

Paul's jaw tightened, and for the first time, he seemed at a loss for words.

"I'm done, Paul," Sarah said, her voice steadier now as she wiped her wet face with the back of her hand. "I'm done pretending. I'm done sacrificing myself for someone who doesn't deserve it. I'm done sitting in a lethal marriage that almost killed my son. I'm done. And just so you know" her voice cracked. "I've signed the papers. All that's left is your signature."

Paul's brow arched as he glared at the trembling woman across from him. He picked up the file

74.

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again, flipping through the pages as if they'd reveal something different this time. His eyes darkened, but he didn't speak.

"I know you think I won't go through with this," Sarah continued. "That I'll come crawling back."

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But you'll realize that you're wrong this time because I'm walking away, Paul. From this sham of a marriage, from the life that's suffocated me for years. And there's nothing you can do to stop me."

She turned on her heel and walked to the door, her steps unsteady but determined. Somehow, deep

6/12

74.

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down, she hoped he'd say something. Apologize or ask her not to leave. But he said nothing, just as expected. The only sound in the room was the echo of her heels against the hard floor and the loud beating of her heart. She stepped out of the office, her heart heavy as the door clicked shut behind her.

That was it - her long years of a sham marriage to a selfish man were coming to an official end. She had stayed for her son, and now she would leave for her son's safety.

Paul sat alone in the silent room, the divorce papers still in his hand. For a moment, he stared at them, his expression unreadable. Then, with a sharp exhale, he tossed them onto the desk.

"She'll come around," he muttered to himself, dismissing the tense moment as nothing, then returned to his task. He had a party in a few days, and as for Hunter, he would be fine. Sarah was just being emotional.

### **A Few Days Later**

Paul stood in one of the grand rooms where his latest business party was going to take place, his face hard with irritation as he barked into his phone.



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"How many times do I have to remind you, Sarah?" he growled. "You knew what today was, and you still chose to stay at the hospital, hovering around Hunter like a nursemaid when you're supposed to be here."

"I'm not coming, Paul," Sarah said firmly, her calm refusal only fueling Paul's anger. "I refuse to abandon my son when he needs me the most. You can enjoy your party on your own."

The line clicked dead. Paul lowered the phone slowly, his jaw tightening as a low growl escaped his lips. He shoved the phone into his pocket with such force it was a wonder it didn't c\*\*\*k.

He cursed under his breath before returning to his party.

The event was in full swing, radiating luxury with its glittering chandeliers and elegantly designed ballroom. Laughter and clinking glasses filled the air as servers gracefully offered champagne, while a soft piano played in the background. Paul greeted influential guests with a smile, exuding authority as they praised his achievements and consoled him about his son's accident. No one criticized him for hosting the party; after all, Hunter was fine, and time was money. Paul scanned the room, feeling a swell of pride as

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everything unfolded just as he had envisioned.

An hour into the event, everything seemed triumphant. The lively crowd laughed and formed alliances over champagne. Paul, on the other hand, was in a good mood, eager to unveil his product in his upcoming speech. Just as he stepped toward the podium, a piercing sound shattered the air.

**Brrrrriiiiiinnng!**

The fire alarm blared, cutting through the celebration. Gasps and murmurs rippled through the crowd as everyone froze. Then, chaos erupted when water rained down from the sprinklers, soaking everyone and everything in the ballroom. Women shrieked, clutching their expensive gowns and the men shielded their heads with their jackets. And, the once-lively event quickly transformed into frantic shouts and hurried footsteps.

Paul's security team immediately formed a tight circle around him as they ushered him toward the exit along with the shouting crowd.

"Find out what's going on!" Paul barked at his head of security, his jaw clenched in anger. "This is a multimillion-dollar launch; someone must pay for



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this disruption.”

Somewhere in the building, Dave moved swiftly through the crowd, his heart pounding with adrenaline. Dressed in the uniform of the event staff, he blended seamlessly with the staff, which aided him in pulling off his plan perfectly.

All because of Paul, Dave had been a fugitive for days, and Paul even had the nerve to post his pictures everywhere, making it hard for him to move around. But thankfully, he had one of Hunter’s penthouses to himself, a hidden spot no one would suspect and where he had perfectly crafted his plan to avenge his father.

The fire alarm had been an easy plan to execute, all he did was trigger it with a small fire set in a storage room to activate the sprinklers and drench everyone.

Through the chaos, Dave spotted his target: Paul, surrounded by his bodyguards. His grip tightened on the knife concealed in his hand. This was the moment he'd been waiting for. Paul Gray - the man who had ruined lives without a second thought, who had trampled on anyone who dared stand in his way, would finally pay for his sins.

As Paul was being ushered toward the exit, Dave



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surged forward. The crowd, still frantic, provided the perfect cover. In a flash, he slipped past the guards, his movements swift and precise.

"Sir, get back!" one of the guards shouted, but it was too late.

Dave lunged, the blade glinting under the dim chandelier light before it sank into Paul's neck.

A collective scream erupted from the crowd, and everyone scrambled for their lives, not even bothering about pushing one another.

Paul staggered, his hands flying to his neck as blood spurted between his fingers and mouth. He collapsed to the ground, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"Move!" someone yelled as they carried Paul off the ground.

Dave, on the other hand, didn't resist as the guards tackled him to the ground. He smiled sadly, feeling calm and satisfied despite the chaos around him. He had waited for this moment, and it had been worth it.



8

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10

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