

Chapter 12

The evidence was undeniable, a cold, hard pile of facts scattered across the plush rug. Hayden stared at it, her face a mask of disbelief and terror.

"It's not what it looks like," she stammered, her eyes wide with panic. "I can explain."

Leo, sensing the tension, started to cry, clinging to his mother's leg. "Mommy, what's wrong? Daddy, don't be mad at Mommy."

Emilio looked down at the child, his own son, and felt nothing but a cold, dead emptiness. He pushed the boy away, his movements rough and uncaring.

"I made a mistake," he said, his voice flat and devoid of emotion, his eyes fixed on Hayden. "I thought you were a victim. But you're a monster."

He stood up, towering over her. "I've already called the police. They're on their way. You're going to pay for what you did to her." ②

He turned to leave, but Hayden scrambled to her feet, grabbing his arm. "No, Emilio, please! I did it for us! I did it because I love you!"

He laughed, a harsh, ugly sound. He ripped his arm from her grasp and grabbed her by the throat, his fingers digging into her skin, his eyes blazing with a righteous fury.

"You didn't do it for us," he snarled, his face inches from hers. "You did it for yourself. You killed her. You killed my wife."


"She was going to leave you anyway!" Hayden shrieked, her face contorted with hate and desperation. "She came to me! She had divorce papers! She made me get you to sign them! She was already gone!"

Her words, sharp and venomous, pierced through his rage. Divorce papers? Elana had wanted to divorce him?

The police officers pulled him off her, cuffing her hands behind her back.

As they dragged her away, she was still screaming at him, her voice a litany of hate.

"You're no better than me, Emilio! You cheated on her! You lied to her! You'll get what you deserve! You'll be alone forever!"

The apartment was silent again, the only sound his own ragged breathing. Her words echoed in his mind. Divorce papers. 

He stumbled out of the apartment, his mind a blur. When he got home, a package was waiting for him by the door. From Elana's lawyer.

He tore it open, his hands shaking. Inside was a copy of the divorce agreement. And at the bottom of the last page, his own signature, a careless scrawl he barely remembered making.

Hayden had told him it was a release form for a new influencer campaign. He had signed it without even reading it.

He sank to the floor, the papers clutched in his hand, and finally understood. Elana had known. She had known everything. She had been trying to escape him, and he had been too arrogant, too self-absorbed to see it.

He had not only lost her to a murderer's plot, he had lost her long before that, to his own lies and betrayal.

He wandered through the empty house, every room a monument to his failure, his guilt a living, breathing thing that would haunt him for the rest of his days. He had lost everything. And it was all his own damn fault.