

## Mr. Warner Your Ex-Wife is Brilliant by Paula Chapter 23 -

### Chapter 23

The butler, shuddering like a **mouse** cornered by a predatory **cat**, approached Zane. **The** murmurs and whispers of their prior encounter had slithered into his consciousness, **yet** they did little to brace him for the gravity of this face-off.

Zane, though diminutive in stature, was the personification of icy resolve, standing unwavering like a fortress amid the tension enveloping the room. An epiphany hit him – Drake wasn't your typical adversary. His predatory gaze was sharp, slicing through artfully constructed deceit like a hot knife through butter.

"Yes, Uncle," he answered, nodding obediently. Drake's presence, he knew, could strip him bare, exposing his true intent. It would be best to keep the masquerade alive.

"Miss Lea's not your real mother. So, who are you?" Drake's words slashed through the weighty silence.

Unperturbed, Zane locked eyes with the older man, his serenity a glaring contrast to the chill in Drake's stare. "Actually, Zachary and I are classmates. We just went a tad overboard with our prank the other day, right Zach?"

Drake's dark look shifted, its arctic chill now directed at Zachary.

"Yes, Dad, it was my doing. I apologize for deceiving you," Zachary confessed, guilt feigned brilliantly on his features. Internally, he was kicking himself. 'Why did I cover for him? I'm as much a pawn in this game.'

"Go upstairs and entertain yourselves," Drake's gaze slid from Zachary to Zane, the ambiguity in his eyes not lost on the boys.

With a curt nod, Zachary led Zane to his gaming paradise on the third floor.

"Thank you," Zane's gratitude trailed behind Zachary as they climbed the stairs.

"Next time, Dad's hearing the truth!" Zachary pouted, his chubby face a mix of annoyance and warning. Behind him, Zane merely shrugged in response.

“Welcome to my kingdom,” Zachary opened the door and proclaimed, his voice resounding with authority. “Here, the realms of virtual and physical intertwine. You’ll find a treasure trove of gaming technology and training gear. What do you think?”

Zane nodded appreciatively, his gaze gliding over the assortment of gaming consoles. “Why not immerse ourselves in the world of games?” he suggested excitedly.

A cascade of digital excitement unfolded, captivating Zane with its surreal whirl. Equipped with their 3D glasses, they plunged into an exhilarating afternoon of virtual warfare. Soon, the hours of intense gameplay had them scattered on the floor like battle weary warriors.

Zachary turned towards Zane, his breath ragged. “Thank you!”

Zane quirked an eyebrow. “For what?”

“This has been one of the best days ever!” Zachary’s wide grin gradually transformed into a bittersweet smile. “Many think it is super cool to be a Warner, with all the money and fancy stuff we have. But it’s not that fun, really. I always have to be the best at school, and someday I’ll have to take care of the family business. Kids only want to be my friend

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because I’m rich, not because they like me. Except you.”

Lane was startled by the despair evident in Zachary’s tone. Despite the grandeur surrounding him, Zachary was simply a lonely child.

Zane’s demeanor softened, the walls around his heart crumbling. “I’m not exactly popular either. From now on, let’s pledge to be good friends!” he offered, a genuine smile lighting up

his face. He had never felt such unguarded happiness before.

‘Do you want something to drink? I’ll have Miss Lea whip something up,’ Zachary **suggested**, wiping **the** sweat off his forehead.

‘No need. It’s getting late. I should be heading back.’ Zane shook his head. ‘Mommy will arrive soon. I have to go back quickly or risk running into her.’

Upon stepping into the living room, Zane’s gaze landed on Jane, who was unlacing her shoes by the entrance. Uh—oh! It was too late to hide now. His mind scrambled for an excuse. Before he could craft one, Zachary’s cheerful voice echoed around the room.

‘My beautiful teacher!’ Zachary’s eyes sparkled at the sight of Jane, his spirits lifting in her presence.

‘Zac,’ Jane addressed him, ruffling his hair. Then her smile froze as her gaze met Zane. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘Do you two know each other?’ Zachary’s brows furrowed in confusion.

‘Yeah, she’s the pretty aunt who lives upstairs!’ Zane offered the fabricated backstory. He saw Drake stiffen at his words, his face darkening with intrigue.

Jane felt an uncomfortable knot **in her** stomach. She’d always wanted to keep Zane and Drake separate, fearing her son’s clever mind might unravel secrets better left untouched.

‘Shouldn’t you be at the arithmetic competition?’ Jane’s **voice** held a touch of anger, but she quickly suppressed it for fear of sparking Drake’s curiosity.

‘Actually, Zane and I met at the competition,’ Zachary announced, his fascination with Jane momentarily eclipsing his earlier conversation with Zane.

Jane observed Zane’s demeanor. He appeared composed, suggesting that he hadn’t yet connected the dots about his father. She released a sigh of relief.

Zane’s expression, though, displayed a fluid blend of astonishment and amusement. ‘Seriously, Zach? One moment we were classmates, and suddenly we met at the competition. Your tales are getting tangled, buddy. What happened to your IQ?’

His gaze danced around **the** room, carefully avoiding Drake’s watchful stare. ‘Traitor,’ he **thought**, eyeing Zachary.

“Zane, make yourself at home **in** the living room while I get to **my** class,” **Zachary** suggested, adopting the air of a thoughtful host.

**As Zachary** and Jane **ascended** the stairs, Zane sat quietly on the **couch**, his attention **seemingly engrossed** in a book.

**Yet, Drake’s** attention remained **glued to** him. His hawk-like eyes scrutinized **the** child’s all-too-familiar **features**, a nagging sense of **dejà vu persistently** gnawing at his **consciousness**.

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“What do **your** parents **do?**” Drake **asked**.

**A bitter** smirk flickered **on Zane’s face**. His father **was a** certified **gigolo!**

Outwardly, he **responded**, “**My** father passed away shortly after I was born. **My** mother **single**-handedly **raised** me, dedicating her entire life to us.”

Drake’s **expression** clouded over with Zane’s revelation.

**The** child’s craftiness now seemed a byproduct of his fatherless upbringing. It **was** a heart-wrenching image – a child left to navigate life’s turbulent waters without a paternal

compass.

‘I overheard Zachary mention your prowess in mental arithmetic,’ Drake tried to steer the conversation away from its gloomy course, his voice softening. A sudden bond stirred within him towards Zane, born out of the child’s early loss that mirrored his own paternal responsibilities.

“Quite modest, I must say. Losing my father early on was tough, but my mother did an incredible job educating us. And Uncle, you’ve been wonderful to Zachary too! Despite your demanding work, you’ve managed to give him a life of comfort,” Zane replied, a sincere smile adorning his face.

His words brought an unusual warmth to Drake's typically stoic demeanor. "You've got an old soul, kid. You're wise beyond your years."

"My mother raised us to be responsible. She wanted us to grow up respectful, especially after losing our father so early," Zane's tone bore a weighty gravity, subtly critiquing Drake's aptitude as a parent.

Just then, Jane and Zachary reappeared downstairs.

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