

51.

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A perfect and unexpected gift she never saw coming, one that would turn her world from good to worse in ways she could never imagine.

Estelle felt her stomach clench with fear as the man's laughter echoed loudly through the room. Her offer should have worked, right? She was certain that men like him, driven by greed, could always be bought off. It was obvious since he had seemed obsessed with money from the moment she regained consciousness. So what's so funny about this? Or was she wrong? Because there was nothing funny about what she said or her situation.

After what felt like an eternity, the man finally stopped laughing, and his expression shifted almost immediately. He met her eyes with a cold, serious look that made her blood run cold. Estelle swallowed nervously, the remnants of her confidence wavering under his intense gaze.

"What makes you think that would work on me?" he asked, his voice low and his smirk dangerous.

She swallowed hard, mentally putting on her brave face. It was now or never. "No one on earth would say no to the kind of money I'm offering,

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especially not someone like you." Her voice wavered slightly when his brow arched, but she pressed on. "You know who I am. You know how wealthy I am, and my family. I can pay you whatever you want. Money is not an issue for me."

She licked her dry lips, silently praying that her words would sway him, that her life could still be saved.

However, his grin only widened, sending a shiver down her spine. "Oh, I know all about you and your rich family, darling," he said, leaning in slightly. "But let me crush that tiny hope of yours."

Her heart skipped a beat as panic set in.

"I could kill you now, demand the money from your family anyway, and still get rid of you when I'm done. So tell me, how sure are you that you'll walk out of here, even with all your money, because, nothing is stopping me from taking everything I want."

Her heart raced with dread. What was she thinking? Why hadn't she thought of that? Offering money wasn't enough to guarantee her safety. Panic clawed at her chest. How would she get out of this alive? What could she do now? Then, like a miracle sent from above, a thought came to her.

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"I know you could do that," she said, her voice barely above a whisper, "but what if it's too late?"

The man tilted his head, his eyes narrowing. "What do you mean, too late?"

"My father," she began, stalling for time as her brain scrambled to piece together a believable story. "He's not the kind of man who waits around when something happens to his family. I guarantee they've already figured out where I am by now." She knew her family would do anything to find her, but she needed to ensure her own survival before they located her.

His eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How would they know that?"

"There's a—" She stopped mid-sentence when the man suddenly stood, his eyes blazing with a new intensity. He stormed down the hallway with purposeful strides, leaving her behind without a word.

Estelle's heart pounded in her chest, every muscle tensed as her eyes followed his retreating form until he disappeared around a corner. What had she said? Was he angry? Had she said something wrong without realizing it? Did she manage to piss him off again? She had been careful—so careful—

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just trying to negotiate her way out. What had set him off? Panic surged through her as her mind raced with possibilities.

Her answer came when he returned, holding something in his hand. His eyes were blazing, deadly, and she could feel the fury radiating off him as he raised an object—which she finally noticed was her bag.

He flung it onto the floor, its contents spilling out in a messy heap. Estelle's pulse quickened as he crouched down, rifling through her belongings as if searching for something. When he spotted whatever he was looking for, which ended up being her watch, his whole body stiffened.

"s**t," he muttered under his breath, clutching the watch with so much force that Estelle wondered what exactly she was missing. It was just her smartwatch. Why was he so fixated on that?

Before she could even process what was happening, he smashed the watch against the ground with all his might, making a yelp of surprise spill from her mouth. Estelle barely had time to recover from her shock before he was on her, his hand clamping around her throat with a force that made her eyes bulge in terror.

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"You knew they were going to track you with this watch, didn't you?" he snarled, his grip tightening with every word. "Is that why you've been so confident this whole time?"

Track her? How? ...Wait! Oh my God, of course! Her smartwatch! Her family could track her

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through the watch. How had she forgotten that? She had been so desperate, so focused on bargaining her way out, that she hadn't even thought about it. But like a miracle, it came to her rescue when she needed it. She felt an overwhelming urge to cry out loud and dance to

express her gratitude for the little miracles.

But none of that mattered if she couldn't breathe. Her lungs screamed for air, and she clawed at his hands, her body thrashing as the chair beneath her teetered on two legs.

"I-I didn't know," she gasped, barely able to force the words out. Her vision blurred as she struggled for air.

"Don't lie to me," he snarled, his grip tightening even more, pressing harder until her body couldn't fight any longer. Black spots danced in her vision, her lungs screaming for oxygen, and she was on the verge of passing out when he finally let go with a furious curse.

Estelle gasped, falling into a fit of violent coughs as her body desperately fought to draw air into her lungs. Her hands ached to soothe her bruised neck, but of course, they were still cruelly bound.

"I didn't know," she managed to rasp, her throat raw with pain.

The man glared at her but began pacing. His hands tugged at his thinning hair, and Estelle couldn't help but feel a twinge of pity for his retreating hairline.

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Then, out of nowhere, she spoke again. "I can help you," she blurted, then winced.

He paused, staring at her with a mix of confusion and annoyance. "Help me?"

Estelle cleared her throat. "You can leave now, and I won't reveal your identity," she said, her voice gaining strength while the man regarded her with an arched brow. "But can I offer you even more, and I'll still pay you triple, just as I promised."

The man scoffed. "Now you're offering me a job?" His gaze blazing with shock and anger

Estelle didn't flinch. She met his gaze steadily, "Yes, I want to hire you," she stated firmly.

"What?"

"I need you to find someone for me," she said, her voice unwavering while the man stared at her like she'd grown an extra head.

There was no room for fear anymore. It was about time to shed the "good girl" façade. Estelle had put up with Carla's manipulations and indulgences for far too long, always playing the patient, understanding woman. But this? This was the final straw. Hiring someone to kill her? Unbelievable and totally disgusting. But what no one knew, not

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even Carla, was that Estelle had been digging into her past for months. It started innocently enough, born out of envy, jealousy, and curiosity. But what began as curiosity and anger unearthed secrets far more dangerous than even Carla herself would ever imagine anyone knew.

Secrets Estelle had planned to bury because, despite everything, she hadn't wanted to stoop to Carla's level. But now? After the deadly stunt Carla pulled, Estelle realized she was done playing cool and calm. No more turning the other cheek like a good girl. It was time for Carla to earn something for her deceitful and wicked ways, and Estelle knew the perfect gift to present to her.

"Yes! A perfect and unexpected gift that she wouldn't see coming!"

 Luna

"
Carla wouldn't see it coming.
"



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