

4.

"The betrayal cuts to the core of my being, leaving me questioning everything I fought for. How could you, the person I loved above all else, callously betray and toss me away like garbage."

Estelle couldn't believe her ears. Her heart quivered with pain because the man she dedicated all her youthfulness and marriage to had just said the most absurd sentence ever.

"You couldn't control yourself?" She repeated as if she still couldn't believe those words had dropped from his mouth. "Is that your explanation for making me a laughingstock for a woman who left you years ago? The same woman you once cheated on me with? You've got to be kidding me" She muttered in disbelief, pulling her hair as she paced the space between her and Hunter.

"Estelle..." Hunter stepped forward, reaching for her, but she recoiled.

"Don't touch me." She shouted, her eyes conveying her pain. "You don't get to touch me with those lthy hands." Hunter dropped his hand, allowing it to fall to his side with a frustrated sigh.

Tears welled up in Estelle's eyes, and she struggled to keep her voice steady. "For years, scrap that. Ever since we gained maturity, I have only loved you. I only had eyes on you and despite knowing you only saw me as a friend at rst, I couldn't help the growing feeling. I dressed up for you, showed up for family friends' dinner even when I was dead sick, all for you." She paused, sniffed and wiped the tears that were running freely down her swollen lids. "I turned down relationships and accepted dating you even when I knew it was a request from your parent and not from you, but I was so damn happy to nally be with you." A bitter laugh escaped her lips at the memory then she shook her head. She couldn't believe how love-stricken and dumb she was. "Even after you cheated on me with my best friend, I forced myself to understand and try to let go of you, but my stupid self couldn't help but accept your parents' marriage proposal despite my family being against it, yet," She paused again in an attempt to control her breathing through her tears and aching heart. It felt like her breathing was depreciating as she spoke.

"Yet, you never once looked at my side. Not even in those two years of our marriage. I endured everything for you, Hunter. I endured those cold nights alone with a smile, telling myself you're tired. I endured the cold shoulders you turned to me. I endured you turning down social gatherings and family dinners. I endured you forgetting my birthdays, I endured all the pains all by myself without any complaint, yet you did this to me."

"I never asked you to endure anything for me, Estelle," Hunter stated harshly, shutting Estelle, who looked stunned. He sighed and continued in a calm voice "I didn't...and that is exactly why I led for a divorce. To free you from this misery"

The word hit Estelle like a physical blow directed at her chest. She staggered back, clutching the sofa for support. "W...What?"

"A divorce, Estelle. I already have my lawyer preparing it." His voice was cold and detached. "It will be sent to you tonight, and you'll be free from enduring anything that concerns me" He responded as if it wasn't a big deal except it was for Estelle, whose eyes widened in utter disbelief and fear.

"Hunter, I don't like this. If this is a joke, you must stop it now."

"Do I look like I'm joking?" His brow rose in question.

No, he doesn't. He looked dead serious, like a demon ready to steal a life, and Estelle saw that.

Estelle's hands trembled as she looked at the man she thought she knew. The man she had given her heart and all to, only to have it shattered. "You must be crazy." She said, her voice barely holding together.

"Yes, I am. I went crazy when I found out my father threatened the woman I love all because of you. I went crazy when I realized I had a daughter who was on the brink of death, all because of you. All because of your obsession and selshness. You stole everything from me and now that I have them back? I have no intention of letting them go." He rambled, the veins in his neck popped out as he spoke.

Estelle stumbled back in shock. She felt like she'd been punched in the gut and her hands trembled beside her as she took another step back, as if the distance could protect her from the pain. "You, you have a child?" She didn't understand what he meant by her stealing from him, but he had a child? Carla birthed his child?

"Yes, exactly what I said. Carla birthed my child. What part do you need me to repeat?"

"That... that can't be possible. No, it can't be possible" She repeated, tears gushing down her eyes. "You can't divorce me because of that. Not after everything". She yelled.

"Yes, I can, and I will" Hunter yelled back.

"No, you can't." She shook her head wearily, tears inging into the air as she did. "Not after everything I did and endured for you, Hunter. I spent all those years of our marriage pleasing you, doing everything just for you to notice me."

"I never asked for any of that, Estelle" He shouted "f**k it!" He groaned and rued his hair before lifting his blazing eyes which showed no remorse towards hers. "You knew Estelle. You know where my heart is. You know I was never into this marriage. You knew I would only ever love Carla and could never let her go, yet you went ahead with the marriage. No one forced you into marrying me when you knew I didn't love you. It was a decision you took yourself, and you expected this, so don't even try to guilt-trip me."

Estelle's lips parted and closed like a sh. Yes, she was aware but

"But everything has changed these past few months. You changed__"

Hunter sighed, his face lled with regret as he looked up to meet her gaze. "This may hurt you, but I have been pretending," he confessed.

"Pretending?" Estelle asked, tilting her head and narrowing her eyes in confusion at Hunter.

"Yes," he replied. His voice sounded hesitant, but his eyes were as cold as ice. "I've been putting on an act of loving you."

Estelle riled back at his words while tears rolled out of her eyes at the nonchalant way he had said them.

"An act of loving me?" She whispered, not quite believing what she heard.

"Look" he started, taking a step towards her, his hand raised to touch her, but she recoiled, and he stopped, and then let his hands drop to his side. "I do not mean to hurt you, but this is inevitable. After spending years with you, it was becoming unbearable for me. It was hard to share a bed with a woman I didn't love. I was tempted to le a divorce, but I knew my parents would only nd another woman. Knowing you, I couldn't do it. You are an understanding woman and more calm and I fear another woman might not put up with me like you did, so that brought up the act. But now, I'm ready to free you."

She gasped and shook her head, "No, no that's not true. I... I can't believe this. No, I won't sign the divorce papers. I won't allow some woman to steal you away from me again." She screamed, her emotion a jumbled mess.

Hunter's jaw clenched as he took a few steps toward her, only stopping when he was just inches from her face. "What made you think that I belonged to you, Estelle?"

Estelle's wet lashes uttered in pain, and his heart constricted painfully, but he covered it with a hateful smirk. "I was never yours and will never be yours and if it takes me to cut your nger to sign the divorce paper, I would take the option with a goddamn thank you." He turned and walked out of the room, leaving Estelle stunned and broken.

She sank to the oor, her sobs lling the empty room. She had given Hunter everything, but in return, he had shattered her heart to pieces. In her grief, she still couldn't bring herself to hate him. After all, he was the only man she had ever and would only love.