

5.

"With each pain, you tore apart the fabric of our love, leaving me to pick up the shattered pieces of a life I thought was real."

Estelle still couldn't grasp the reality of what was happening to her. It felt like a nightmare, a painful and horrible one, and no matter how hard she tried to break free, a force kept pulling her deeper into the harsh truth. Her bare feet padded softly on the tiled oor as she made her way out of her matrimonial home. She didn't know where she was going, but after crying her eyes out for hours, she needed a breath of fresh air - anything to clear her mind and gure out how to deal with the horrible situation.

As soon as she reached the large gate, it opened automatically, and ashes of light blinded her. She raised a hand to shield her eyes, feeling like they might render her permanently blind. A sea of reporters had gathered outside her gate, waiting for her to show up, their cameras ashing mercilessly, not caring about her disheveled appearance.

"Mrs. Gray. Oh, sorry, Ms. Brown. What would you say about the current state of your marriage with Mr. Gray?" A reporter pointed her camera directly at Estelle's face, her eyebrows raised mockingly. Estelle didn't need anyone to tell her that the reporter was making a jest of her situation, hoping to capture her reaction.

"f*****g reporters," Estelle thought, her anger bubbling beneath her trembling exterior.

Estelle balled her sts at her sides, forcing herself to meet the reporter's gaze before levelling a glare accompanied by her legendary sweet smile. "First, it's Mrs. Gray to you." She lifted her hand, showing the camera her wedding ring. "And as for your question, there is nothing to talk about. My marriage is perfect. My husband impulsively reacted because he missed his ex. It's nothing serious." She completed her statement with a smile, even though her insides were trembling. The reporters froze for a moment, staring at her like she had grown another head. What woman in her right mind would call her husband's cheating an impulsive move?

"Isn't that a twisted way to justify cheating?" another reporter argued, making Estelle's eyes twitch as they snapped towards her blazing ones. "Your husband practically cheated on you with his ex in front of the world. Shouldn't you be upset? But then, it's obvious you're not in a settled state of mind considering your current appearance. Your hair is unruly, your wedding gown is ripped, and you're walking barefoot."

Murmurs from the other reporters lled the air, followed by the harsh ashes of cameras as they took continuous shots of Estelle. She and the challenging reporter locked eyes in a battle of wills. Estelle glared at the reporter, who glared back, daring her to deny the truth. Estelle knew she wouldn't win. She broke eye contact, took a deep breath, and wore the same sweet smile that showed no evidence of the sadness lurking in her heart.

She raised her head condently, staring directly at the ashing lights. "My husband got carried away at that moment, but I assure you, he is still my husband, and not even Carla can take him away from me." The reporter smirked, amused by Estelle's condence. But time would tell, wouldn't it?

Somewhere, in a hospital ward, Hunter's eyes narrowed on the television screen, his jaw tensed, and his sts clenched tightly.

"She has got to be kidding me," he thought. He knew Estelle to be exceptionally condent and not one to give up quickly, but he had hoped the stunt he pulled, even though it was impulsive at that moment, would make her give up. However, it seemed he had given her a new resolve he couldn't understand. The image of her wide, teary eyes ashed across his vision, and he winced. It wasn't his plan to hurt her; he had tolerated her love for him for a while. But shouldn't the raw pain he saw in her eyes be enough for her to give up?

"Seems your wife loves you so much," a soft voice spoke.

Hunter blinked out of his daze and turned his gaze to Carla, whose beautiful ocean-blue eyes were staring at the screen with a sad smile. His heart constricted painfully at the sadness in her eyes and the term "his wife." Carla could have been his wife, and they could have been a lovely family with his daughter if it hadn't been for his parents' obsession with him marrying Estelle, especially his father. Pure anger boiled in his veins as he recalled Carla's teary eyes when she had explained the reason she left two years ago.

He should have known; he should have known his father had a hand in Carla's disappearance. It was still hard to believe, and so much more upsetting that his father had stooped so low as to threaten Carla to leave him, all because of Estelle.

"I'm sorry," Carla muttered, her wide blue eyes teary as she took a step back. "I shouldn't have said that."

Hunter blinked and realized he had been glaring at Carla, and she must have thought he reacted that way because of what she said. He quickly moved towards her and grabbed her hands. "Oh, darling," he cooed, kissing each of her palms, his eyes softening as he lifted them to meet Carla's. "How many times have I told you to stop apologizing? You have no reason to feel apologetic for anything. If I'm right, we all, including Estelle and my father, should be the ones apologizing for causing you and Mara pain." He wiped a tear that had escaped her beautiful eyes as he spoke. Damn! Those blue eyes looked angelic yet sinful.

Carla shook her head and pulled her hands from his grasp before turning her back on him. Her reaction infuriated Hunter, and he gritted his teeth and balled his st in frustration. Carla had been avoiding physical touch since the kiss at the hall; she wouldn't allow him to go further than kissing her palms. He wanted more; he wanted to kiss and touch her in ways he knew she loved, he wanted to make love to her as he had always imagined, and show her how much he missed her, but she wouldn't allow him.

"That was a long time ago, and trust me, I'm over that." Hunter nodded absentmindedly as she spoke. All he wanted was to have those lips of hers around his aching c**k. "I wouldn't have come back if it hadn't been because of Mara. I couldn't bear losing her; she was my only hope, Hunter." She turned her tear-soaked face towards Hunter and all the s****l thoughts he had been entertaining died immediately like a quenched re. He reached out instantly and pulled her into his embrace as she choked on her sobs. "I need to see Estelle and tell her everything. I need to apologize for all the pain I've caused her."

Hunter's jaw tightened in anger. The way Carla put others' emotions above her own was both amusing and infuriating. But then, that was what he loved about Carla; unlike Estelle, she was considerate, seless, and always put others' happiness before hers. Those were the attributes that had drawn him towards her, and knowing she still had them made his urge to keep her stronger.

"With a rm voice, he stated, "There's no need for that." Carla shook her head in disagreement, wiggling out of his embrace, but Hunter pulled her tighter, dropping a kiss on her head before saying, "Because I already sent her a divorce letter."

He had done the right thing. Finally, he had done the right thing he should have done years ago."