

25.

"You're not weak? Then prove it. Show the world that strength isn't about never falling, but about rising every time you do."

Have you ever felt like your heart was put in a blender, its blade cutting through mercilessly? That was how Estelle felt as she gripped the tennis racket, so tightly her knuckles turned white. The rhythmic sound of the ball bouncing back against the wall echoed in the empty court, along with the thudding of her heart. She had come here to be alone, to rid herself of the suffocating thoughts that had tormented her all day. And every time the ball slammed hard against the wall, she felt all the pain she had been holding in tearing out of her body with a pain she could no longer bother to care about.

The revelation... the revelation had pulled open a raw wound in her, one so deep it tore into her every nerve. Why? She wondered, a tear sliding down her cheek. Why was this happening to her? Why couldn't she get a breath of fresh air before being thrown back into the stench of her trauma? Why was God punishing her?

"Just why?!" her mind screamed, her arm swinging violently, sending the ball crashing against the wall with a thud. "Why is it always me?"

Her chest heaved with frustration, tears burning behind her eyes as her body vibrated with barely contained fury. But her eyes were focused on her prey—the ball. She smashed the ball again, harder this time, with the same force as it came back at her. "I lost everything!"

Another swing.

"My baby!"

Another much harder swing.

"My life! For what? For him to just move on? To already have a child with her?"

Another forceful swing sent the ball back even faster, but she remained unsatisfied despite the overwhelming fatigue and pain coursing through her body. It didn't feel enough to match the fury coursing through her veins. She felt like her insides were breaking, as if the grief she had bottled up was now spilling out uncontrollably.

She gave him everything... everything! She thought bitterly, her breath catching in her throat. And he gave her nothing. Nothing! Broken promises and lies would have succeeded as something, but he gave her nothing, and she had stayed regardless. Yet, where did that get her?

A sob-like-scoff escaped her lips just as her racket hit the ball once more, sending it crashing against the wall with a violent c***k.

"Here, in the middle of a court, while he gets to be happy, gets to have a family, while she's left with absolutely nothing. Not even the chance to hold her baby! Not even the chance to... to be a mother..."

The word caught in her throat and her swings grew wild, erratic. Tears now streamed down her face, her vision blurring as she fought to keep herself together, but she couldn't as another shaky sob tore past her lips. Was I not enough? Why couldn't I be enough? She gritted her teeth, her heart pounding in her chest like it wanted to escape her body, to run far away from the pain. Why wasn't my love enough to make him stay? Why wasn't I enough for us to be happy? Why... Just why couldn't he love me?

She continued hitting the ball furiously despite her body screaming with exhaustion, the ball matching her energy. Tears streamed down her face rapidly, and she wiped them away with the back of her hand, but they kept coming, blurring her vision. She was exhausted, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. Her arms ached from the effort, but she pushed through, refusing to stop or give in. The anger, the grief, the pain, and even the scars had to go somewhere. But even as she hit the ball with all her strength, she still felt them in every part of her body, as if they were taunting her.

A guttural cry escaped her lips, echoing through the empty hall as she swung the racket with all her might. The pain has to go away. I need to heal too. I deserve that as much as he does. But how? How does one heal from wounds that keep reopening every time they think of moving on?

Another shrilling guttural cry escaped her lips. And just as she was about to swing at the incoming ball with all her might, a hand grabbed her shoulder, pulling her away.

Her cries died in her throat instantly, and fear replaced the anger. Panicked and surprised, she swung around and hit the person with the racket. A deep cry escaped the man, and her eyes widened in surprise when silver, yet angry, eyes met hers.

She stood frozen for a moment, staring at his strange yet mesmerizing silver eyes, a color so unusual it almost felt unreal. Her brow slowly furrowed in confusion as recognition ickered through her mind. Then, it nally clicked.

"You," she growled.

The man, who had been rubbing his head, turned to her, his body straightening to his full height, making her tilt her head to see him properly.

"Who are you, and why are you following me around?"

His brow furrowed, lips parting to speak, but she cut him off.

"Are you a reporter?" she demanded, her eyes darting around, searching for a camera. "Did you take a perfect video of my mental breakdown? Because yeah, I cried over a man who didn't bat an eye before discarding me!" Her voice grew louder, almost a scream.

"Yes, I cried because I lost him, and he got to start over." Her eyes burned with bitter tears, her voice crackling. "Yes, I cried because I didn't know how to live anymore with my past constantly swirling around me. So what? You're going to plaster it all over the news?" She stepped closer, her breath trembling with emotion as she yelled. "Do it. I don't give a damn!"

"I'm not a damn reporter," he shouted back, his voice laced with irritation.

Her mouth clamped up in surprise, and he stepped forward, his hard glare meeting hers. "And even if I was, no one wants to see someone crying over a man like a pathetic little victim."

She recoiled, taken aback by the sharpness and coldness of the statement.

"You lost someone? Good. Move on, just like everyone else has to. Can't move on? Then do something better instead of trying to kill yourself."

Her lips quivered, clearly not expecting such cruel but honest words from a stranger. "You... you don't know me," she screamed. "You might have seen me in my worst state, but I assure you, I'm not weak."

"Then prove it," he snapped, "instead of sitting here, crying and hitting a ball till you pass out—that's what would be pathetic."

She stood, astounded, her lips parted, watching as he left her alone, lled with so many emotions that she didn't know which one was more prominent.