

44.

"Where was she? She would never venture into the darkness, fearing it like a haunting memory, for the scars it might leave behind could shatter him with unbearable agony."

*f**k! f**k! f**k!*

Ryan slammed his hand against the steering wheel, his jaw clenched as he sped down the road, the city lights blurring around him. *What in the world had he done?*

He had kissed her. He had kissed Estelle.

The thought raced through his mind like a storm, each wave more torturous than the last. His hand gripped the wheel tightly, his knuckles white with tension. This wasn't supposed to happen. This wasn't why he was there. And more importantly, Estelle was off-limits, untouchable in so many ways he could list, but now? Now he had crossed that line, and he didn't know how to fix it.

It wasn't that the kiss had been bad—hell, it had been everything he secretly imagined it would be. Her lips had been soft, warm, and inviting in a way that ignited something deep within him. But that

44.

+20 Points

was the problem. He wanted more. His body burned for more of her, and that scared him more than anything.

He shook his head, his grip tightening on the wheel as guilt, shame, and an unexplainable desire began to creep in.

He had always been drawn to Estelle, ever since they began their strange and twisted coincidental meetings. Spending time with her had become something he craved, though he always told himself it was just to rile up Hunter, to help her get under her ex-husband's skin. But somewhere along the way, he'd started looking forward to being around her, to the small moments they shared—the laughter, the late-evening conversations, the ease with which she let him in.

And now, he had ruined it. He had ruined it all by kissing her.

"f**k!" he growled under his breath, aggressively shifting lanes, ignoring the blaring horn of the car he had cut off. His thoughts swirled with confusion, frustration, and... longing. He wanted her, more than he cared to admit, but she was the last person he should be dragging into his mess of emotions.

44.

Estelle was good—too good for him. She deserved someone who could love her properly, not someone like him. What did he know about love? He'd never been given any growing up, never learned how to show it. Every relationship he'd had which was few was shallow and transactional.

1

[Ads-free >](#)

Love was a foreign concept to him, and Estelle needed more than he could offer. She deserved to be loved with every ounce of someone's being, and he feared he wasn't the right man to give her that.

But the kiss...

His jaw clenched tightly. The kiss, as perfect as it had felt in the moment, had been a mistake. And now, he was stuck with the reality that he wanted something he couldn't allow himself to have.

His phone buzzed on the passenger seat, pulling him from his thoughts. With a glance, he saw an unknown number flashing on the screen.

Who the hell is this?

He ignored it at first, but when it rang again almost immediately, Ryan let out a frustrated groan and grabbed the phone, swiping to answer.

"Yeah?" he barked, not bothering to mask the irritation in his voice.

"Mr. Hayes?" A soft, steady voice answered, surprising him. It was an older woman, calm but with an unmistakable note of urgency and authority.

"Who is this?" Ryan asked, sitting up straighter, his tone shifting from irritation to calm in an instant.

"This is Anna," the voice continued, with a hint of urgency. "Estelle's mother."

Ryan's stomach tightened as he asked, "Mrs. Brown?" He was now alert and his mind reeled with every possible thought as to why Estelle's

mother was calling him. Despite his closeness with Estelle, he hadn't even met the woman. What could be the urgency? "Is everything alright?"

"I... I'm not sure." Her voice trembled slightly. "I've been trying to reach Estelle, but she's not answering her phone. Her driver told me she was coming home with you, but she hasn't arrived yet, and now she's not picking up. Is she with you?"

Ryan's heart stopped. *s**t! Estelle.*

He had promised to drive her home—he had even watched her send her driver away—and then... the kiss, the damn kiss, happened. He had been so rattled, so lost in his head and emotions, that he'd left without even thinking.

"No, she's not with me," Ryan forced the words out, his pulse quickening. "I'm going back to check on her," he added quickly, swerving the car in a sharp U-turn. "She'll be home soon, I promise."

Anna let out a relieved sigh, though it did little to ease the tension building in Ryan's chest. "Thank you, Mr. Hayes."

The call ended, and Ryan slammed his foot on the accelerator, his pulse quickening with each passing second. He couldn't believe how reckless he had been. He had promised to take her home,

and instead, he'd left her alone in that damn building, late at night, knowing she feared the dark and driving. She never discussed her insecurity with him, not even a slip, but he'd seen her twice in that state and she never drove herself, not even after he jokingly asked her to once. Yet, he had forgotten all that because he couldn't keep his emotions in check.

His frustration turned into anger as he drove recklessly down the busy road.

.....

Ryan's car screeched to a halt outside the office building, and he dashed out, his heart thudding in his chest. He hurried inside, his shoes echoing in the eerily quiet hallway as he made his way to her office. She'd better have a good explanation for why she was ignoring her mother's call. He could try to understand why she was ignoring his, but not her mother's. God help him contain his anger or....he froze when he reached her office door.

There was no sign of her.

Her office was dark, the lights off, as though she had already left.

*f**k!*

Where are you, Estelle? Where could she be this late at night, especially since she feared the night like a haunting memory?

His hand shook slightly as he pulled out his phone to dial her number again while walking back down the hallway. The ringing filled the silence, and his eyes darted around, hoping—praying—she would pick up this time.

But nothing. He was directed to voicemail again. His fist clenched around his phone, heart pounding with exertion and anger as he redialed her number.

And then, he heard it—a faint sound, muffled but unmistakable. Her ringtone.

Ryan's heart leapt as he followed the sound, moving down the hall until he reached the lobby. His eyes scanned the dimly lit area, and there—on the floor, near the entrance—lay her phone.

s**t!

His breath hitched as he hurried over, crouching down to pick it up. The screen was cracked, and the call from him was still displayed on the shattered glass. His pulse quickened.

Where the hell was she? Why would she leave her

phone here? And looking at the cracked screen, it had fallen with force.

Ryan's mind raced with possibilities as he pocketed the phone, standing up and scanning the empty lobby once again—and none of them were good. His first fear was that she could be somewhere fighting off her trauma all by herself, and his stomach churned with guilt. He wouldn't forgive himself if that was the case.

However, as he and the few security men he alerted searched the whole building for her to no avail, his second fear became a reality. He knew right there and then that something wasn't right. Estelle would never go into the dark she feared for solace, especially without taking her phone with her.

She wasn't there.

Something is wrong



3

Comments



111

Vote



Watch videos get points (0/20) >