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Sometimes, the heart yearns for a place untouched by memories. A corner of the world where the shadows cannot follow. Perhaps in the silence of a new dawn. She could find the strength to mend her fractured soul. A fresh breeze might carry away the weight of her past. While unfamiliar skies whisper promises of healing. It's not about escaping the pain. But learning to breathe where sorrow hasn't yet taken root. For in the embrace of a new horizon. She might rediscover the courage to be whole again.

The hospital room was unnervingly quiet, the steady hum of machines the only sound breaking the stillness. Estelle sat across Ryan's bed, her fingers trembling as they rested against the stiff fabric of her skirt. Ryan lay motionless, his face pale and bruised, a bandage wrapping his temple and an oxygen mask attached to his face. The faint rise and fall of his chest was her only assurance that he was alive.

She swallowed hard, the lump in her throat tightening as her eyes traced the lines of his injuries. The nurse's earlier words replayed in her

mind.

"Despite his inability to breathe properly, he still managed to mumble out the possibility of a kidnap just before passing out again. It was amazing."

Her chest ached and a choke sob escaped her lips. How could someone be so selfless to the extent of getting severely injured? Especially for her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, her voice breaking as tears slid down her cheeks. "I'm so, so sorry, Ryan."
"

Her gaze dropped to his hand, resting limply beside him. She hesitated before lightly brushing her fingers against his.

"You shouldn't have been involved in this," she continued, her voice low. "You shouldn't have gotten involved with someone as stupid as me. I dragged everyone that meant a lot to me down because I was too stupid to let go of something that was never mine. I couldn't even protect the people who meant something to me because I was too blinded by my obsession. First my baby, and now you..." Another tear streaked down her cheek. "I should have left a relationship I knew

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wasn't going to get better, but I refused to, and now I've hurt myself and everyone around me over and over again. And now it's you..."

The weight of her regrets grew heavier, pressing painfully on her heart as tears flowed freely down

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her cheeks. She sniffled, wiped her face, and her words continued to spill from her lips in remorse.

"I should leave. For good this time. Maybe it's better if I disappear. At least then, people wouldn't have to suffer because of my stupidity."

She laughed bitterly, a hollow sound that echoed

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in the sterile room. "Because all I've done is ruin lives, Ryan. I can't even fix my own mess."

Her voice cracked as she added, "I don't deserve this kindness. Not from you. Not from anyone."

She buried her face in her hands, overwhelmed by the storm of emotions that threatened to drown her. She was so absorbed in her anguish that she didn't hear the soft click of the door opening.

A sharp intake of breath startled her. Estelle quickly straightened, her hands darting to her face to wipe away the tears. Her palms brushed against the fabric of her skirt in a futile attempt to compose herself as a shadow loomed over the room.

The figure stepped in - a tall man with sharp features, dressed casually but exuding an air of authority. His piercing glare swept over her, from her dishevelled hair to her tear-streaked face and back again, lingering for a moment too long.

Estelle shifted uneasily under his scrutiny. Summoning her voice, she offered a polite, "Good evening."

The man didn't reply. Instead, he turned his back to her, walking deeper into the room. He placed a small duffel bag on the side table with a loud thud,

the sound reverberating in the tense atmosphere.

Estelle blinked, her confusion growing. "I'm sorry," she started cautiously, her voice trembling. "Who are you?"

The man finally turned, his lips curving into a no-nonsense smirk. "And who are you?" he shot back, his tone laced with disdain.

His rudeness made her flinch, and heat crept up her cheeks. Before she could respond, he interrupted again.

"I asked a question."

Estelle's mouth opened and closed, irritation and unease bubbling within her. Something about the man was both annoying and intimidating, making her want to stand her ground yet shrink away.

"You can't just walk in here and start interrogating people," she snapped, her voice sharper than she intended.

The man raised an eyebrow, clearly amused. "I'm his friend," he said smoothly, his tone dripping with disdain. "So, I'll ask again - who are you?"

Estelle straightened her shoulders, refusing to back down. "I'm a friend too," she replied, meeting his gaze evenly.

The man scoffed, "Friend? Is that all he is to you?"

Estelle's brow furrowed deeper in confusion. It was hard to tell what exactly the man wanted.

"I can't believe this," he continued, his tone turning sharper, shaking his head as if speaking to himself. "This is the woman Ryan risked his life for? The one he spoke about with so much obsession and admiration? The one who left everything behind, including the place he called home, to chase her, and even risk his life for? And now," his sharp glare snapped to her, "here you are, claiming to be just a friend."

Estelle's eyes widened in shock and confusion. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out.

The man stepped closer, his expression hardening. "Do you have any idea what he's been through because of you? Do you even care? Do you even harbour the same feelings for him, or were you just using his feelings to your advantage?"

His words were like daggers, each one cutting deeper into her heart. Estelle clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms as she fought to keep her composure. She wanted to argue, to tell

this rude man she cared for Ryan, that it wasn't her fault he got involved with her. To tell him she never knew him from Adam, but the words wouldn't come.

"I knew you were bad luck the moment he said you reminded him of his mother. I should have stopped him from going to the hospital and from coming down here to look for you," he murmured to himself, filled with regret.

Estelle's gaze, blooming with unshed tears, snapped to him. "What?" she asked.

The man's gaze lifted to her, and he hissed when he saw the confusion in her expression, "You didn't know?" Estelle furrowed her brows at his question, and he scoffed.

"I can't believe this. What do you even know about him if you didn't know Ryan is the man who saved you at the hospital that night?"

Estelle froze. It was true she knew nothing about Ryan, but was Ryan the man from that night...?

"You should leave," the man said coldly, his voice soft but cutting. "For his sake. Don't you dare show your face to him again. Let him live his life without you dragging him down."

Estelle's throat tightened, and she swallowed hard, willing herself not to cry again. She had no defense, no argument to counter his accusations. The weight of her guilt and the revelation that Ryan was the man who saved her that night was already crushing her, and his words only added to the burden.

Without a word, she turned and walked out of the room, her heart heavy and her vision blurred with unshed tears. Estelle walked briskly down the corridor, her chest tight and her emotions swirling. The man's harsh words echoed in her mind, each one a fresh sting. The man's words must have been cruel, but they were honest. She had been nothing but a nuisance to Ryan. She brought him nothing but a near-death experience, and the most embarrassing part of all was that she didn't realize the man with the dark gaze - her saviour - had been Ryan all along. How could she have possibly not recognized him? How was that even possible?

She stopped near a window, pressing her hand against the cool glass as she tried to steady her breathing. She closed her eyes, her thoughts drifting back to the first night she met Ryan, his gaze dark and filled with worry. It made sense a little now - Ryan's presence in her life. Their meeting at the bar and him saving her once again

wasn't a coincidence as she had thought. But why didn't he tell her? She couldn't possibly have recognized him that night because it was dark, and she was in a daze. Still, her mind haunted her with the thought that she could have learned more if she had been more invested in their friendship.

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She could have shown more interest in him if she hadn't been so focused on avoiding her feelings for him. But now, he had a near-death experience because of her, and she couldn't help but feel deep regret.

"Maybe I should disappear," she murmured to

herself. Maybe a long vacation as her parents had suggested was the best option. She had been deluding herself when she told herself that she was going to move on here, but it seemed impossible. Maybe a new environment would help her move past all this trauma in her life. Perhaps that was the only way to honor Ryan's selflessness without continuing to burden him and her family.

With a deep breath, she turned and began walking, her steps purposeful despite the uncertainty ahead.



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