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Entangled fate, a delicate thread. Woven in shadows where hearts have bled. Love, a labyrinth of joy and despair bound by a destiny neither could prepare. Each touch, a spark; each tear, a chain, a bittersweet dance of passion and pain. In your arms, I'm found; in your absence, I'm lost, our souls intertwined, no matter the cost. Though the world may tear us apart anew, our entangled love will always see us through.

The soft hum of the air conditioning and Olivia's laughter filled Estelle's consultation studio as she adjusted the paper on her drafting table. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows, illuminating the array of fabrics Para had brought earlier for Olivia's inspection. This was her sanctuary, her space to create without distraction. But today, it felt like the walls were closing in.

Olivia had been animatedly talking for the past fifteen minutes as she examined fabric samples with wide eyes, her excitement for the wedding dress contagious. Or at least, it would have been if Estelle could bring herself to focus.

Her pencil danced across the paper, sketching out

the rough outlines of the gown Olivia described. But her thoughts betrayed her, dragging her to the man seated just a few feet away. The one person, responsible for her discomfort.

Ryan.

He sat across the room, silent and still, with his hands clasped loosely in his lap, his posture relaxed. His piercing gaze bore into her, unwavering and heavy with tension that Olivia, oblivious as ever, somehow failed to notice. Estelle's pencil trembled in her hand, her strokes uneven as she tried to avoid meeting his gaze. Every time she caught his stare, her heart skipped a beat, and she desperately tried to ignore it.

It had been years since she last saw him, years since she walked away without a word. And yet, here he was, sitting in her studio, his presence unravelling her carefully built composure.

Why is he even here? she thought. Isn't it petty enough that I'm designing his bride's dress? Does he have to sit here and watch me squirm, too?

"Estelle?" Olivia's chipper voice snapped her back to the present. Estelle flinched, the reaction making her pencil falter, the tip pressing too hard and snapping. Olivia, unaware of the tension,

continued her chatter without pause.

"What do you think about adding a lace overlay to the bodice? Something classic, but with a modern twist. You know, elegant but sexy."

Estelle blinked, trying to keep her expression neutral. "Lace would be beautiful," she said, her voice measured and professional. "We could use Chantilly lace. It's delicate but would complement the silk overlay perfectly."

"Perfect!" Olivia beamed, clapping her hands together. "See, Ryan, I told you she's amazing. I knew she'd get it."

Ryan didn't respond. Instead, he leaned back in his chair, his eyes still locked on Estelle. She avoided his gaze, her heart pounding as if trying to escape the confines of her chest.

Get a grip, Estelle, she scolded herself, quickly reaching for another pencil and returning her gaze to her sketchbook.

"Ryan, don't just sit there like a statue," Olivia teased, nudging him lightly. "You're making poor Estelle uncomfortable. Lighten up a little, will you?" she whispered, but Estelle heard.

Her heart sank at the comment. Although Olivia's

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+5 Points

tone was playful, the words felt like knives cutting into her.

Of course, he's serious. He's here with the love of his life, and she's nothing but a wind that passed through his life once upon a time. Her chest tightened, but she forced herself to keep

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sketching.

Ryan's lips twitched into what could barely be called a smile. "I'm just... observing," he said, his voice cool and unreadable. Estelle's gaze met his once again before she could stop herself. And what she saw in his eyes made her stomach twist.

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She swallowed hard, her grip tightening on the pencil in her hand. She had to stay professional. She couldn't let herself fall apart, not here, not now. But the weight of his presence, his gaze pressing on her, the memories of their past, and the knowledge that she was designing a dress for his bride were suffocating.

"Estelle?" Olivia's voice pulled her back. "Are you okay?"

Estelle forced a smile. "Yes, of course. I was just touching some parts. Here, let me show you."

She turned the paper toward Olivia, nervous about her sketch for the first time. Olivia leaned in, and almost instantly, her face lit up.

"Oh my gosh, it's perfect! Ryan, look!" She shoved the pad toward him, her excitement spilling over.

Ryan leaned in to study the drawing, his eyes narrowing slightly. "It's... impressive," he said, his tone neutral. But his gaze flickered to Estelle, and something unspoken passed between them.

Estelle quickly looked away, pretending to adjust the fabric samples on her desk. Her hands were trembling again and it was due to his compliment. Maybe it was because she didn't expect him to say her work was impressive. *Get a grip, Estelle,*

she scolded herself, but it did nothing.

Olivia's phone suddenly buzzed, and she picked it up with a dramatic sigh. "A minute, please. I'll be right back!"

As soon as the door closed behind her, the room plunged into silence.

Estelle kept her eyes firmly on the fabric in front of her, but she could feel Ryan's gaze burning into her. *Why did he have to look at her like that? Like she owed him every explanation in the world .*

Maybe she did, but she just prayed he wouldn't say anything. But, of course, he did.

"Why did you leave without saying goodbye?"

His voice was soft, but the question hit her like a slap. Her fingers froze mid-motion, and for a moment, she couldn't breathe.

"It's been years, Ryan," she said finally, her voice barely above a whisper as she pretended to busy herself with the fabric once again. "Isn't it a little late for that question?"

"It's never too late to ask when it matters," he replied, his tone unwavering.

Her breath hitched, and slowly, she lifted her head, her eyes meeting his for the first time since Olivia

left the room. The intensity in his eyes was unbearable, it was a mix of hurt and something else she couldn't name that made her stomach twist painfully.

"I thought it was better that way," she said quietly, her voice tight, her grip tightening on the fabric in her hand. "For both of us."

"For me, or you?"

His words hung in the air, heavy and accusing. Estelle shut her eyes tightly in pain, her mouth opening to respond, but no words came. How could she explain the guilt, the fear, the belief that leaving had been the only way to protect them both?

She looked away, guilt twisting in her chest. "I didn't know what else to do."

"You didn't...."

The sound of the door opening shattered the moment. Olivia breezed back in, phone in hand. "Crisis averted! Now, where were we?"

Estelle quickly turned back to her desk, pretending to busy herself with her sketchpad.

"We were just talking about the design," she said, her voice steady despite the turmoil inside her.

"Right!" Olivia plopped back into her chair. "So, about the train, should it be long and dramatic or short and sweet?"

Estelle forced a smile and launched into a detailed explanation of different options, even though her mind was screaming for the discussion to end.

Unfortunately for her, the session dragged on with Olivia chatting away while Ryan remained mostly silent. Estelle focused on the work, but she couldn't ignore the weight of Ryan's presence or the ache in her chest.

But then, during the session, she glanced up and realized Ryan was no longer sitting at the table. He was by the window, his back to them, staring out at the city below, just as he did the previous day.

Her eyes lingered on him for a moment too long. The way his shoulders tensed, the way his hands were shoved into his pockets - it was too familiar, too painful. She quickly looked away, her cheeks burning.

When the meeting ended, Olivia stood, a satisfied smile on her face. "I can't wait to see the final design. Thank you so much, Estelle."

Estelle nodded as she walked them to the door. Olivia continued to chat about the fabric choices,

but Estelle hardly paid attention. Her focus was on Ryan, who was walking behind her. Even without looking back, she could sense his eyes on her, which puzzled her. *Why was he here? Why this place of all places? It seemed impossible that it was merely a coincidence.*

As Olivia stepped outside with a goodbye, Estelle expected Ryan to linger since he had been walking behind her. But to her surprise - and strange disappointment - he walked past her and out of the door without a word or a glance.

Estelle's heart twisted painfully as she closed the door behind them and leaned against it, her heart pounding in her chest. She pressed her hand to her face, trying to steady her breathing.

This isn't fair, she thought bitterly. I left to make things easier, but now he's here, and everything is so much harder. Why is this happening to me again?

"You know him?"

Para's voice broke the silence. Estelle opened her eyes and met Para's gaze as she leaned against the doorway.

"What?" Estelle asked, pulling herself off the door as she tried to pretend she didn't know what Para

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meant.

"You have a past with the groom, don't you?"

Estelle's cheeks burned, and her heart pounded

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wildly in her chest. "Don't be ridiculous, Para."

Christ, was it that obvious?

Para shrugged. "You can try to deny it, dear, but it was clear on your face. Both of your faces." She said and disappeared back into the fabric store.

Estelle's heart raced. Was she really that obvious? If Para, who hadn't been fully engaged in the consultation room, could pick up on such details,


it wouldn't be long before Olivia noticed too. What had she gotten herself into? She needed to maintain a professional demeanor, no matter what, and she hoped this deal concluded as soon as possible.



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