

82

Well, this just got interesting, he murmured, When a misunderstanding turns into a revelation, it's not just the truth that emerges - it's every buried feeling, every unsaid word, every scar we tried to hide. It's the ache of realizing what we lost while clinging to our pride. It's the fear of facing what we've ignored for too long. But maybe, just maybe, it's also the chance to start over, to rewrite the story we thought was already finished. Because sometimes, the deepest wounds reveal the strongest love. And maybe this, this moment, is our second chance at forever. Maybe

Estelle sat on the edge of her bed, staring at the alarm clock that had been blaring for the past five minutes. She hadn't summoned the energy to stop it, let alone face the day. Her mind had been clouded with thoughts of Ryan ever since their last encounter. "Isn't that too late?" Her own voice echoed in her mind, followed by the memory of Ryan's expression - hurt, disappointment and anger mingling in his eyes. She groaned aloud and covered her face.

Though it was partly true, she shouldn't have said

it like that. She regretted not explaining herself better, regretted not apologizing. She should have told him why she left, but her courage had failed her. His sudden presence in her life had thrown her off balance. Ryan had been a closed chapter she never expected to revisit, much less rewrite. She had thought her world would remain neatly separated from him, from Hunter, and from everyone else tied to her painful past. Well, except her family. But it doesn't seem so anymore.

The loud buzz of her alarm pulled her back to the present. Sighing, she turned it off and rubbed her temples. There was no escaping the day, not when she had to meet Olivia to source fabrics for her wedding. Normally, this would be Para's task, with Estelle joining occasionally if her schedule allows. But Olivia had insisted on being involved in every step of the process.

Estelle admired Olivia's enthusiasm, it was refreshing, but she also dreaded it. Well because he would be there. Estelle's stomach churned at the thought of seeing Ryan again. He had already tried to talk to her, and she couldn't shake the feeling he'd try again. For Olivia's sake, she hoped he wouldn't.

Reluctantly, Estelle rose from her bed, dressing

82

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quickly, and as she slid into her car, she sent a quick text to Para, asking her to meet at a nearby park so they could drive to the location together. Once Para was in the car, she greeted her cheerily, but Estelle could only muster a weak smile in return as they made their way to the destination.

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As they neared the large fabric complex, Estelle's nerves intensified. Her palms became clammy against the steering wheel, and she rubbed them against her skirt, hoping Para wouldn't notice her unease. When they parked and stepped out of the car, Estelle's heart jumped as another car pulled

3/9

up nearby. One she recognized.

The door swung open, and Ryan emerged.

Estelle's breath hitched. He was casually dressed in a white, short-sleeved button-down shirt that perfectly outlined his shoulders and the toned muscles of his arms. Loose trousers hung stylishly on his hips, and the sharp-cut hair and the dark sunglasses shielding his eyes only added to his magnetic, almost untouchable aura. Although the sunglasses hid his eyes, she could feel his gaze on her. Her cheeks flushed as he walked toward them with a confidence that made her heart beat erratically, and she quickly looked away, her heart hammering in her chest. *Where's Olivia?* she wondered, scanning the car for movement, anything to distract her from the man walking towards her.

"Good morning, Mr. Hayes," Para greeted cheerfully, snapping Estelle out of her thoughts.

Ryan's lips curved into a small smile as he replied, pressing a gentle kiss to Para's palm in a gentlemanly gesture. He then turned his attention back to Estelle, his gaze intense behind the dark lenses of his glasses. Just as she managed a tight "Good morning," he took her hand and kissed it lightly, just as he'd done to Para.

It was a polite gesture, harmless in any other context, but the innocent brush of his lips sent a jolt through her, the warmth of it coursing down her arm and settling in her chest. Estelle bit her lip and tapped her foot nervously, trying to conceal the effect it had on her. *Since when does a simple kiss on the hand feel this way? Why does it affect me like this when it shouldn't? Get your act together, Estelle.*

"We can head in," Ryan who looked rather amused as Estelle struggled to conceal his effect said, his deep voice pulling her attention back. "Olivia will join us shortly."

Estelle nodded quickly, eager to break the charged silence. As they walked inside, she caught a glimpse of a man stepping out of Ryan's car. He was dressed simply, not like security. Her brows furrowed in curiosity. *Who is he? A driver?* she wondered, but quickly dismissed the thought.

Inside the fabric store, time seemed to stretch. Estelle tried to focus on the task at hand. She fingered through racks of fabric, pulling out swatches and holding them against the light. But Ryan's presence was impossible to ignore. He didn't hover, but his proximity was enough to make her hyperaware of every detail - the faint scent of

his cologne, cedar and citrus; the quiet sound of his breathing; the heat radiating from his body. Every single detail.

Her hands trembled slightly as she flipped through fabrics. *Get it together, Estelle*, she scolded herself. But how could she, when every breath she took seemed to sync with his?

"Don't you think I deserve an apology, at least?"

His voice broke through the silence, low and intimate. Estelle froze, her heart skipping a beat. He was so close behind her that she could feel the warmth of his breath against her neck. The words felt more like a caress, and she suppressed a shiver.

"I..." she started, her voice barely audible. Then, gathering her courage, she replied without turning, "Don't you think you should go look for your bride?" She said it abruptly, her voice sharper than she intended.

The silence that followed was deafening. Then, to her surprise, Ryan laughed, a deep, rich sound that reverberated through the room.

"What?" he asked, his voice laced with amusement. "Olivia? My bride?"

Estelle turned, her cheeks flushing with confusion.

"You thought Olivia was my bride?" he asked between chuckles, his grin teasing.

Her mouth opened, but no words came out. *Was I wrong? What's so funny?*

Her cheeks burned. "Isn't she?" she managed to ask, her voice faltering.

Ryan took a step toward her, and instinctively, Estelle stepped back. But he kept advancing, his movements slow and deliberate, until her back pressed against a shelf of fabric.

"Why did you think that?" he asked, his tone shifting to something softer and more sultry. "Is that why you've been avoiding me? Is that why you've seemed so uncomfortable?" His tone was teasing, but his eyes were clouded with amusement and something else she couldn't quite name.

Estelle's cheeks burned as she stammered. "I...I wasn't...I...I don't know what you're talking about," her gaze darting anywhere but at him.

Ryan leaned in slightly, his lips curving into a mischievous smile. "You're a terrible liar, Estelle."

Her heart raced as his words and closeness

overwhelmed her senses. She felt trapped, cornered by the intensity of his presence and confused by the situation. She struggled to find a response when the sound of a door closing and approaching footsteps jolted them both back to reality.

Ryan stepped away, and Estelle quickly turned her attention back to the fabric, her cheeks flaming. She barely had time to compose herself before Olivia entered, a bright smile on her face.

"Sorry I'm late!" Her cheerful voice filled the room as she entered.

Estelle was about to respond when Olivia gestured to the man standing behind her - one Estelle hadn't noticed until Olivia said, "This is Alex, my groom."

Estelle's head snapped up. "Groom?"

"Babe, meet my designer. Isn't she beautiful?" Olivia chirped, oblivious to Estelle's shock and the tension in the room.

Estelle blinked, her gaze flicking to the tall, broad-shouldered man who looked familiar and was glaring at her for reasons she couldn't comprehend. Then she looked at Ryan, who appeared utterly amused by the situation in question. Her mouth opened and closed as she

82

+10 Points

tried to process the revelation, but no words came out. All she could do was stare, her confusion mirrored by the groom's barely concealed disdain.

*Ryan was telling the truth; he wasn't the groom.
And why does that man look familiar?*

Ryan on the other hand chuckled softly. "Well, this just got interesting," he muttered to himself.



4

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20

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