

83

83

*What have I gotten myself into? Each step feels like a chain dragging me back and deeper, each choice a shadow chasing my every breath. I thought I was reaching for the light, but now, all I*

Ad

Ads-free >

*see are walls closing in. The weight of regret pierces my heart, and the voices of my past echo louder than ever. How did I come to stand here, in this storm of my own making, powerless to find a way out?*

Estelle hadn't expected the day to get worse. Meeting Ryan again had already thrown her equilibrium out of balance, but now she felt a cold weight settle in her stomach as she realized who Olivia's groom was - Alex. The man she had encountered at the hospital - the one who had brazenly told her to stay away from Ryan. If Ryan's presence had unnerved her, Alex's glare added a suffocating layer of discomfort. The large, airy room felt constricting under the heat of his accusing stare. Estelle tried to focus on the vast array of fabrics spread out before her, but her hands trembled slightly every time she caught a glimpse of the man's gaze.

Ryan, on the other hand, was entirely at ease. He leaned casually against a table, his lips twitching with amusement as he watched her squirm. Olivia, blissfully unaware of the boiling tension, hummed happily while sifting through the stacks of fabric. Estelle couldn't help but envy her ignorance. It was obvious she had no idea about her past with Ryan, because if she knew, then she was doing an excellent job pretending otherwise.

As Olivia held up another roll of fabric, Estelle forced herself to focus. Para, her assistant, was trying her best to steer the bride toward something more practical, but Olivia was

determined to see every option the store had to offer.

"How about this one?" Olivia asked, holding up an intricate lace design.

"It's beautiful," Estelle said, her voice steady despite her racing heart. "But the pattern might clash with the beading on your gown."

"You're right," Olivia replied, setting it aside. Her eyes scanned the rows of fabric collections before she picked up another, her delicate, manicured finger - painted in a light blush pink - massaging the textile meticulously.

"Estelle, what do you think of this?" Olivia asked, holding up a swatch of soft champagne-coloured satin.

"It's lovely," Estelle replied, forcing a smile. "It would look perfect for an evening gown or even a bridesmaid dress."

"I don't know..." Olivia's lips pursed in thought. "Let's see a few more options first."

Estelle stifled a sigh. Olivia was meticulous to a fault, and while Estelle usually appreciated a client's dedication to their wedding, today wasn't the day for prolonged indecision - not with Ryan



and Alex silently burning holes into the side of her face. She refused to look their way.

As the minutes turned into hours, Olivia's enthusiasm didn't waver. Every piece of fabric had to be touched, examined, and compared against the others.

"Are you sure this won't wrinkle easily?" Olivia asked, turning to Para, who had been patient throughout the ordeal.

"This material is known for its durability," Para assured her.

"But what about under bright lights? Will it shine too much?"

"No, it has a subtle sheen, but nothing overpowering," Estelle added quickly, hoping to move things along.

Olivia nodded but didn't seem fully convinced. She moved to another section, leaving Estelle a moment to exhale in frustration but it was short-lived.

"Enjoying yourself?" Ryan's voice came from right behind her, low and teasing.

She jumped slightly, her cheeks flushing. She hadn't realized he had moved so close. When she

turned around to face him, her eyes moved behind him to find Alex across the room. With his back towards them, he was receiving a call.

"I'm working," she replied stiffly, now turning away from him.

"And here I thought you were avoiding me," he murmured. His voice was so soft that it felt like a caress against her skin.

*And your friend,* Estelle thought to herself as she clenched her fists at her sides. She didn't think Ryan was aware that she knew Alex. He was still asleep when the man rudely asked her to stay away from him. And it wouldn't be a surprise if he came saying that to her now again since Ryan was in the same space with her.

"I have nothing to say to you, Ryan."

"Oh, I think you do," he countered, his tone laced with amusement. "A lot, in fact."

Before she could retort, Alex appeared behind Ryan, his glare holding Estelle in place. "Ryan," he called.

Estelle seized the opportunity to escape Ryan's proximity. She stepped backwards and disappeared around the corner to where Olivia

was inspecting yet another new fabric.

The hours dragged on, with Olivia meticulously examining every fabric. By the time they finally settled on a design - with Olivia saying the long-expected sentence, "*I think this is the one*" - Estelle felt drained emotionally and physically. Para looked equally exhausted, though her calm demeanor never wavered. Estelle was ready to bolt when Olivia clapped her hands together with a bright smile.

"Why don't we all grab a late lunch together? It's been such a long day."

Estelle froze and opened her mouth to decline, but Olivia continued, "Please, Estelle. You and Para have been such great help today. It's the least I can do."

She glanced at Para, hoping for an excuse, but the older woman, who was visibly tired, simply smiled politely, saying nothing.

It made Estelle feel bad. If she said no, it would be unfair to the older woman who needed to rejuvenate. And if she said yes - her eyes instinctively flickered to Alex, then Ryan - she would be trapped between these men again.

"I don't think..." Estelle began, but Olivia cut her



83

+10 Points

off.

"Oh, come on! We've been working all day. We deserve a treat. My treat!"

Her earnest sincerity left Estelle with little room to refuse. Reluctantly, she agreed, though her nerves

[Ads-free >](#)

were already fretting at the thought of being trapped at a table with both Ryan and Alex. She cursed her luck silently as they made their way to the restaurant.

The seating arrangement was a nightmare. Olivia and Alex sat across from Estelle, while Ryan took

7/12

the seat beside her. Ryan's proximity was maddening; the warmth of his body radiated through the narrow space between them, and every small movement he made sent her heart racing. Across the table, Alex's glare was relentless, and she could feel it even when she wasn't looking at him.

"So, Estelle," Olivia, oblivious to the tension, began cheerfully as she stirred her drink. "How did you get into the bridal business? You have such an eye for detail I can't help but wonder"

Estelle cleared her throat, forcing herself to focus. "It started as a hobby, really. I've always loved designing, and it just grew from there."

It was true. She had long enjoyed designing things, though it started as her playing model in her room while creating styles from her existing clothes. It was why she had a camera fixed in her room to capture herself while playing dress - the same camera that captured Hunter and Carla's moment.

Wow, how that felt like a long time ago. It felt weird because she didn't even feel anything at the memory - not pain or disappointment.

"That's amazing," Olivia said, genuinely impressed.



"I've seen your work. It's so elegant and unique."

"Thank you," Estelle replied, managing a small but genuine smile.

"What about you, Para? How long have you been in the fashion world?"

Para smiled warmly. "Almost ten years now. Although, I specialize more in fabric sourcing and all. I'm not really into designing." She let out a soft chuckle, dabbing the corner of her lips with a tissue.

Olivia let out an, "Oh."

"Yes, but I would say in all those years, I felt like a real designer with Estelle, dear. She makes me feel like I'm more than a fabric source. Watching her business grow while she engaged me in every aspect of it has been wonderful."

"Aww! That's nice," Olivia whined cheerfully.

Estelle's cheeks burned under their praise, but she kept her eyes fixed on her water glass.

Lunch dragged on, with Olivia carrying the conversation while Estelle did her best to contribute without revealing her discomfort. Ryan remained maddeningly calm, occasionally offering teasing remarks, while Alex, on the other

hand, was like a storm cloud - silent and brooding.

When they finally stepped outside, Estelle was ready to escape. But just as she opened her mouth to excuse herself, Olivia turned to her with a bright smile.

"Oh, before I forget, Estelle, I'd love for you to come to a dinner party we're hosting this weekend!"

Estelle froze. "A dinner party?" She gasped out just as Alex grabbed Olivia's arm, trying to get her attention, but the woman was long gone in excitement.

"Well, I'm not sure I should be referring to it as a diner party since it's just a small, mini-indoor party with just me, Alex, and Ryan. I'd love for you to come. You'd be the only other woman there besides me, and I could really use some female company."

Estelle's stomach churned. She could feel Alex's glare intensify and Ryan's gaze sharpen with barely concealed amusement. She opened her mouth to decline, but Olivia grabbed her hands, her expression pleading.

"Please? It would mean so much to me!"



Estelle glanced at Para, hoping for a lifeline, but her assistant merely smiled. "You should go. It sounds like fun."

"Yeah," Ryan smirked, widening his stance, his arms folded across his chest. "I think Estelle would be a great addition to the party."

Estelle shot him a glare, but Olivia's pleading eyes left her no room to argue.

Trapped, Estelle nodded reluctantly. "Alright, I'll come."

Olivia beamed. "Thank you! You'll love it, I promise."

*I doubt that.* Estelle thought to herself.

If only Olivia knew her past with the two men, she would understand that coming to that dinner party - or whatever it is - was a bad idea. Enjoying it was something unattainable and impossible.

As Olivia and Alex walked to their car, Estelle felt Ryan's presence linger beside her. She glanced at him warily, but he said nothing, his lips curving into an infuriatingly knowing smile.

That evening, as Estelle collapsed onto her couch, she replayed the day in her mind. The suffocating tension, the revelation, Alex's glares, Ryan's



83

+10 Points

teasing - it was all too much. And now, she was roped into a dinner party that promised to be even more unbearable.

"What have I gotten myself into?" she muttered, burying her face in her hands.



13

Comments



20

Vote



Watch videos get points (0/20) >