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*They moved as though the universe had conspired to bring them back, two souls once torn apart, now mending the jagged edges of time. Each breath they shared felt like a whisper from fate, a reminder that some connections can never be severed. In his arms, Estelle found a warmth that ignited her spirit, A fire that had smoldered for years, now roaring to life. Their movements were poetry, a dance written in the language of hearts, Undeniable, consuming, as if the world ceased to exist beyond their embrace. And in that moment, she was no longer broken, no longer afraid—for the first smoldered time in years, she felt the rush of being truly alive.*

The airport buzzed with the usual chaos of announcements, hurried travellers, and the hum of rolling suitcases. Estelle clutched her ticket tightly, her heart racing as she prepared to board her flight. How did she get here? A month ago, she would have laughed at the idea of willingly travelling to attend a wedding overseas, especially one involving Ryan.

Yet here she was, both excited and nervous. It was

silly, she told herself, because it hadn't even been a month since she last saw him. But something about the thought of being around him again filled her with a mix of exhilaration and nervousness.

The past few weeks had been transformative. After the awkward dinner party, where Olivia's usual liveliness was overshadowed by her argument with Alex and the night she almost kissed Ryan in a moment of frustration, things took a surprising turn. Estelle and Ryan grew closer; their interactions evolved from cautious small talk to something more meaningful. It felt reminiscent of the past, but this time it was both different and more intense.

She found herself looking forward to his visits while she worked on Olivia's wedding dress. His presence brought a warmth she hadn't realized she craved. But work had eventually called him away, and soon Olivia and Alex had left as well, the wedding preparations pulling them back home.

Olivia, being herself, had insisted that Estelle join them for the wedding. She had said, "You have to be there - not just for the final fittings, but for me. I need my dressmaker-s\*\*\*h-friend-s\*\*\*h-therapist."

Estelle suspected Olivia's reasons ran deeper. She

must have noticed the growing coziness between her and Ryan. Perhaps this was her way of nudging them closer together. And knowing Ryan, he'd probably had a hand in the invitation as well. But one fear still lingered in her heart because she felt Olivia was being overly friendly with her and

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would change if she found out about Ryan almost dying because of her. Would she still be as cozy if she discovered that truth?

By the time Estelle checked into the hotel Olivia had booked for her, exhaustion had seeped into every corner of her bones. The flight had been



long, and all she wanted was a moment to rest. She sent quick texts to Olivia and Ryan, letting them know she'd arrived safely, and then swiped her room card across the door to let herself in. A beep came from the door just as Ryan's reply came almost instantly, and a smile transformed Estelle's tired face as she read the message.

*"I'm glad you made it safely. Can't wait to see you."*

His words sent a flutter through her chest. She bit her lip, fighting the warmth that spread through her. Shaking her head at herself, she stepped into the room. The space was spacious and luxurious, with soft lighting that cast a warm glow over the white neatly laid bedspread. Estelle let out a content sigh as she kicked off her shoes and ran a hand through her hair. A quick shower and a nap before the evening's inevitable stress, she decided. She'd meet them later after that, Ryan especially.

She felt a twinge of anticipation at the thought of seeing him again. Olivia would undoubtedly be too busy with last-minute wedding details, but Ryan? He'd find the time. He always did.

Cool water cascaded over her skin, washing away the fatigue from her journey. Estelle let out a sigh of relief as she leaned her forehead against the

tiled wall, letting her thoughts wander to Ryan again - his voice, his laugh, and the way his eyes lingered on her face.

*This is ridiculous*, she thought, shaking her head. It hadn't been long since they formed this nameless relationship, and it also hadn't been long since they last saw each other. But there was no denying the way her heart fluttered at the thought of him, which was often, by the way.

She reached for the soap, her movements lazy with exhaustion. Suddenly, a faint sound reached her ears - a soft click, like the door opening.

Estelle froze, her hand hovering mid-air. Had someone just come in? How was that possible when she vividly remembered locking the door? But she had definitely heard a sound.

"Hello?" she called out, her voice trembling slightly. No answer.

Her heart began to race. She turned off the shower and grabbed a towel, wrapping it hastily around herself. Just as she stepped out of the bathroom and opened the door binding the bathroom and bedroom, she came face to face with Ryan.

Her first instinct was to scream, but the sound caught in her throat. She blinked, her mind



struggling to process his presence.

"Ryan?" she gasped, clutching the towel tighter around her body.

He didn't answer immediately. His eyes roved over her, dark and hooded, filled with an intensity that made her knees weak. The air between them seemed to crackle with electricity, making her stomach tighten with something she couldn't name.

"What...what are you doing here?" she stammered, her voice shaky.

Instead of answering, Ryan closed the distance between them in two swift strides. Before she could react, his arms were around her, pulling her close. The warmth of his body against hers sent a jolt of electricity through her.

"I missed you," he murmured, his voice low and rough, as though the words cost him something to say.

"Ryan—" she began, but the words died on her lips as his mouth claimed hers a second after he groaned out, "I miss you," again.

The kiss was urgent, like he'd been starving for her and couldn't wait a second longer. His lips moved

over hers with a hunger that left her breathless. Estelle gasped against his mouth, the sound swallowed by his deep groan as he pulled her impossibly closer, his hands sliding down to her waist, pressing her damp body against his fully clothed frame.

Estelle's initial shock melted into something deeper, something urgent. Her hands found their way to his shoulders, gripping him as the world around them dissolved into nothingness. Where there was only Ryan - the way he tasted, the way he felt, the way his breath hitched as their lips moved together; the way the cool water of the shower on her skin mixed with the heat radiating from his body, creating a tantalizing contrast that made her shiver.

Her towel slipped slightly, but she didn't care. All that mattered was the man before her, the man who kissed her like she was the only thing keeping him alive.

Ryan deepened the kiss, his tongue brushing against hers, coaxing her to open for him, to give him everything. His hands roamed her back, tracing the curves of her body as though he was etching every inch of her into his memory.

Estelle's breath hitched as he broke the kiss, only



for his lips to trail down her jaw to the curve of her neck. "Do you have any idea," he murmured against her skin, "how much I've thought about this? About you?"

His words sent a thrill through her, and she tugged at his shirt, her fingers trembling as she involuntarily pulled him closer. His tongue found the line between her breasts, exposed when her towel slightly slid down her chest. She let out a soft gasp as waves of feeling rushed through her body, making her press her knees together to relieve the ache.

"I tried to pretend I don't want you." He continued, his voice raw while his tongue kept doing sinful things to her body. "I tried to be patient. I've tried, really, and it's impossible."

His tongue rolled around the swell of her breast before he bit it. A loud moan escaped her lips, just as warmth pooled between her legs. "Ryan," She moaned, her hands gripping his shoulder.

He groaned in reply, capturing her lips again, hungrier than before.

When he finally pulled back the second time, each gasping for breath, Ryan rested his forehead against hers. His hands cradled her face, his



thumbs caressing her cheeks while Estelle's mind raced, torn between the overwhelming emotions Ryan had stirred within her and the lingering uncertainty about what it all meant.

"I'll leave if you want me to," Ryan said, his voice hoarse, almost pained. "But if there's even the

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smallest part of you that wants this, that wants me ...say it."

Estelle swallowed hard, her thoughts a chaotic jumble. She didn't trust herself to speak, but deep down, one thing was certain. The passion between them was overwhelming, a fire that burned away

the doubts and fears she'd carried for so long. She had been afraid to feel again, afraid to open herself up to the possibility of love. But with Ryan, it didn't feel like a choice anymore. It felt inevitable. Without a word, she rose on her tiptoes and captured his lips in a quick kiss - one that conveyed her desire for him just as he desired her and she prayed she wouldn't regret it.

When she pulled back, his gaze locked with hers, his eyes filled with vulnerability and so much hunger she hadn't seen before.

"Estelle," he groaned, and before she could blink, his lips were on hers again, slower this time, savouring every moment as if they had all the time in the world. His hands caressed her skin, his touch igniting every nerve in her body. He lifted her in one motion, his lips not leaving hers as he located the bed. With a swift motion, he lowered her onto the bed, making her bounce slightly from the force. Before she could let out a gasp from the unexpected action, his lips covered hers again. Their bodies moved together like two halves of a whole, finally reuniting; their connection was undeniable and consuming.

For the first time in years, Estelle felt truly alive.  
*(Even after her towel went missing.)*



