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Why does the universe weave this cruel pattern? Why must her heart endure the same jagged scars? Is she cursed to relive the ache of shattered hopes, to feel the weight of love slip

through trembling hands, again and again? What lesson lies hidden in this ceaseless torment? Her soul cries out to the heavens, unanswered, as the echoes of betrayal dance in cruel repetition. How many more tears must she surrender to the void?

Why does destiny mock her tender dreams once more? When all she ever asked was to be loved. Was that too much to wish for?

The wedding day was finally here. The bride's suite was a breathtaking spectacle, adorned with cascading white roses and golden drapes that shimmered under the glow of crystal chandeliers. Family and friends filled the room, dressed in their finest, their laughter and chatter rhyming with the soft notes of a live string quartet playing in the adjoining wedding hall. Amidst everything sat Olivia, a picture of perfection, her radiant smile outshining the diamond-studded necklace encircling her neck. Her gown, a masterpiece of satin and lace, clung to her figure and fanned out in a dreamy cascade, making her look like she had stepped out of a fairytale. Her short hair was elegantly swept into a low bun, adorned with pearls. Her excitement was infectious, practically radiating off her, while her laughter rang loudly above the noises in the room.

Unlike Olivia, who was practically glowing with excitement, Estelle sat quietly in a far corner of the bride's suite, her heart and mind weighed down as she watched Olivia pose for pictures, her wide smile never faltering as she twirled and posed. Estelle's lips curled into a small, forced

smile, while her fingers absentmindedly brushed the location of the red patch on her temple, hidden under layers of expertly applied makeup. She hadn't slept a wink the previous night. The whispering voices of doubt and fear had kept her awake, making her ask herself one question over and over: *Was she setting herself up for heartbreak again?*

The question had haunted her all night, making her want to doubt whatever she had with Ryan. But even amid her chaotic thoughts, she told herself that Ryan was different. Or at least, she had tried to force her heart to believe he was. She shook her head lightly as if the motion could banish her thoughts.

Her gaze drifted to Olivia, who was still posing with friends and family for pictures. She watched Olivia break into a beaming smile before whispering something to her photographer. A weak smile involuntarily curled Estelle's lips, as she watched the room lit with joy, while she tried to extinguish the knot in her stomach

As the ceremony began, it was everything Estelle had envisioned a perfect wedding to be. The interior design of the wedding hall reflected Olivia's vibrant personality, capturing her liveliness

perfectly. When Olivia finally walked down the aisle, her father by her side and her gaze fixed on Alex at the end, it felt as if the entire hall held its breath. The guests rose to their feet as she entered, her smile illuminating the hall. Almost immediately, the priest commenced the ceremony with a solemn prayer, his voice resonating throughout the grand space.

Estelle watched the vows unfold, the exchange of rings, the tears glistening in Olivia's eyes as Alex softly whispered something into her ear, a rare gentle smile dancing on his lips when he leaned back to stare at her face. The room erupted in cheers when they kissed, a promise sealed for a lifetime. Guests clapped, some wiping tears, while others took pictures to capture the precious moment.

From her secluded seat at the far end of the hall, Estelle couldn't help but compare this grand and joyous occasion to her own wedding. On her wedding day, she had been a bundle of nerves, unsure of everything except her love for Hunter. She remembered Hunter being stoic and distant, and how her parents had reluctantly supported her decision, her father's stern expression as he walked her down the aisle. The ceremony had been rushed and subdued, devoid of the laughter

and light that now surrounded her.

She blinked rapidly, forcing herself back to the present as the sound of Olivia's infectious laughter mixed with the guests' reached her ears. Olivia had just cracked a joke, earning a laugh from Alex, whom Estelle had never seen laugh before. Even the guests laughed along, enchanted by the couple's chemistry. Estelle's eyes instinctively drifted to Ryan, who stood as Alex's best man.

He looked dashing in his tailored suit that fit him perfectly, his expression as unreadable as always. But beneath the stoic mask, Estelle could see the flicker of pride and joy as he watched his friend marry the love of his life.

His head turned, and as if he knew just where to find her, their eyes met. For a moment, the room seemed to fade away, leaving only the two of them. For reasons she still couldn't quite decipher, her heart quickened the longer they stared at each other. As if he was aware of the effect he was having on her, Ryan's lips curled into a small, knowing smile. Then, to tease her even more, he winked. Heat flooded her cheeks, and she quickly looked away, silently praying that no one had noticed their exchange.

The afterparty was a celebration of love and joy,

transforming the hall into a lively haven filled with music and dancing. Estelle sipped her champagne, pretending to watch the guests as they mingled and laughed. In truth, her eyes scanned the room, searching for Ryan. He had disappeared after the ceremony, and she felt uneasy about his absence.

Her phone buzzed, breaking her trance. She pulled it out, and her heart skipped a beat when she saw Ryan's name.

I miss you badly. S ays the message.

Her heart stuttered, a rush of heat spreading through her chest, then up to her neck and cheeks. Before she could process the message, or think of how to reply, another one came through.

Let's meet at the rooftop.

Her heart raced with anticipation as her eyes darted around the hall until she spotted him slipping through one of the side doors. She hesitated. *Should she go? Would it seem too eager? And what would she even say to him when they come face to face?*

But the need to see and be near him was so strong that after stalling for what felt like an eternity, she excused herself, weaving through the crowd and

toward the elevator. Her heart raced with every step, her breath shallow as she replayed the questions that had haunted her all night. *How would she table those questions to him? And how would he take it? And what if she was wrong?*

The elevator doors opened with a soft chime, and she stepped out onto the rooftop where the city skyline glittered like a sea of stars. The cool night air greeted her, but it did nothing to calm her racing heart. Her eyes scanned the open space, searching for him, but he was nowhere to be found. So, she turned the only corner in the space.

Then she saw him.

Ryan.

His broad frame partially obscured the figure of a woman. Estelle's steps faltered, her breath catching in her throat as she watched the woman's delicate fingers rise to cradle Ryan's neck, making their body seem closer.

No, no, no, Estelle's mind screamed, her chest tightening painfully. She tried to convince herself that she was misunderstanding the scene before her, that it wasn't what she was thinking, that she was wrong, but her heart refused to listen, nor could she will herself to look away. The woman's face became clearer as Ryan shifted slightly, and recognition struck Estelle like a physical blow. It was Anastasia. The same woman that haunted her thoughts.

Her knees wobbled, and her legs felt as if they would give out beneath her as she staggered backwards, her hand rising to her lips in disbelief. Even though she had imagined scenarios like this multiple times throughout the night, nothing could have prepared her for what she was witnessing. It felt as though her past was colliding with her present. As if she were reliving it all over again. *This can't be happening again. Ryan wouldn't do*

this to her.

But the scene before her didn't change. Anastasia lifted her hand, brushing it tenderly against Ryan's neck, and Estelle felt the last thread of her composure snap. She stumbled back toward the elevator as quietly as she could, her vision swimming with tears, her breathing erratic.

She reached it, her fingers fumbling to press the button. When the doors finally slid open, she practically fell inside, slumping against the wall as the weight of her emotions crushed her. Her chest heaved painfully, her tears flowing freely as she clutched her chest as if that would make the pain bearable.

"Why?" she whispered, her voice trembling with anguish. "Why is this happening to me again?"

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