

Cruelty

Grace

Silence ensues on our way back to Tristin's home. I steal occasional glances his way to find his jaw clenched and his eyes glaring out the window.

What Lily said is obviously a lie and it ticked him off. Before, I heard that she had killed Sebastian Roberto too.

But...if she has murdered Tristin's brother and Tristin is powerful enough to make her pay...

Why is he not doing anything to her?

What is he waiting for? 1

" Stop staring at me. " Tristin mumbles.

I flinch, realizing that I forgot to take my eyes off him this time.

Awkwardly, I look out the window and watch the Roberto mansion getting closer. I thought what happened today will leave me shaken up again, but somehow, I am faring better than I expected.

Once Lily is in, Ethan will do everything to get her out. But with Tristin's influence, it won't be easy.

Sighing, I step out of the car once it stops in the driveway. Tristin moves past me, striding straight for the door without looking back.

My eyes narrow. It feels like the whole soft voice act was a show in front of Ethan.

Does Tristin want Ethan to think that there is something between us?

I march behind him. "You haven't had dinner yet, Tristin."

"You can go ahead without me." He says dismissively.

I look around. It's too late at night and from what I know, Alma goes to bed by this time. As for Tristin's sister, she has stayed clear of my path since our first encounter.

"Stop there, and come down to eat. I need to talk to you." I assert, standing beside the stairs.

Can I make him halt if I want? No, I can't.

That's why when I see him not even bothering to listen to me, I turn away and walk towards the dining room.

I should understand that I am powerless here. That thought leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

The maids have already set the table, because Luca called the house when we were on our way back from the restaurant.

I turn my plate and pause. The silence in the dining room threatens to consume my mind. I clench my fists and stare at the wall opposite me.

Maybe once I get the divorce, I should leave. Ethan can keep my inheritance if it keeps him away from me. My stomach tightens as I think about it.

But if I give it a rational thought, I shouldn't give up what rightfully belongs to me. No matter how long it takes to get it back, I can not let Ethan keep my inheritance.

Suddenly, my view is filled with a man's torso. I blink, glancing up at his cold face. Without sparing me a glance, Tristin takes his seat and

turns his plate.

I catch glimpse of his usual spot and refrain from asking him why he is not sitting there. Because...it feels better when he is sitting in front of me and I don't have to feel this profound loneliness.

" She has something that can harm my family. " Tristin hoarse voice sounds, drawing my gaze to his unfazed face.

" Are you talking about Lily?" I whisper, watching him take out several dishes into the plate.

" You wanted to talk about this, right? " He asks, sliding the plate towards me and taking my empty plate.

Surprise flashes across my eyes as I look down at the filled plate. " I _ "

" When you are at war with people you once cared about, you need a lot of energy. " Tristin looks up and our eyes meet. " Eat so you have energy to fight later. "

I press my lips in a thin line and stare at him. Tristin shifts his attention to filling his plate now.

" Do you want me to get this something back from her? " I ask, grabbing my fork.

" You can't, even if you want to. " Tristin rasps, meeting my gaze again. " But I can. I have my ways to make people talk. And she will talk if I get my hands on her. "

My fingers tighten around the fork. His ways can't be humane ways.

" What's stopping you? " I inquire, surprised at my nonchalance.

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" What's stopping you? " I inquire, surprised at my nonchalance.

Why am I not running away right this moment?

" Taking out Lily Whitlock and the rest of the Whitlocks is easy. " He says, cold and calculated.

My breath hitches. " Taking me out is easy for you then?"

Tristin hands freeze. His head lifts and slowly, his eyes become gentle and thoughtful.

" Taking you out as a Whitlock or as a Calder has always been easy, Grace. " He tells me honestly.

I nod, finding his honesty appealing. " Then why— "

" Because I don't want to." Tristin sighs, scooping up some rice. " And I find it extraordinarily hard to do things that I don't want. That's why...taking you out is easy for everyone...but not for me. For me, it will be as hard as..."

He goes silent, eating a spoonful of rice and chewing slowly.

My palms sweat as I direct my gaze towards the empty chairs. In the deafening silence, I find my heart beating faster than usual, it's noise like a drum in my ears.

" Why are you not getting your hands on Lily then?" I change the

topic because I do not understand why he says such things.

" Because of Ethan Calder. Getting rid of Whitlock is not hard but Ethan is something else. " Tristin admits after swallowing.

" But you are as powerful as Ethan if not more and your family has been one of the wealthiest even before the Calders came into the equation. " I frown.

" The Roberto family has always been here. Unshakable even in dire times. " Tristin whispers, his gaze cast down. " Ethan Calder...was not even close to matching the Roberto wealth three years ago. "

" And now he is kind of equal? " I wonder.

" He is. " Tristin nods.

" Still what's the— "

" It took Robertos generations to get here and Ethan did it in mere three years. It was not possible without a certain..." Tristin pauses, as if searching for the right word. " cruelty. "

" Cruelty? As in killing people? " My blood runs cold in my veins.

Tristin stiffens, like he doesn't want to tell me this. Then, he shakes his head.

" It's not possible to rise to the top without blood on your hands, Little Butterfly. You have to get rid of all threats and people who stand in the way of your success. " Tristin whispers " While he was pampering you at home, he was a different man for the world outside. Lily's betrayal turned him into a power greedy man who stopped at nothing to chase the top. "

Of course, even after Lily left, her thoughts were with Ethan, driving him to become the worst version of the man who once was kind and loving.

It seems like the man that I loved was Ethan before Lily abandoned him. And not the man he became in her absence.

" Lily knows it. That's why she is hiding behind Ethan. " Tristin adds.

I blink, and stare at his stoic face. " and where do I come in this situation? "

Tristin lips curve in a chilling smirk. " You abandoned Ethan and damaged his pride again. Now, he is after you. Soon, his ego will drive him to abandon Lily to appease you even if temporary. I just want that. "

My shoulders stiffen. " You just offered to send me away if I want that and—"

" You refused. Now, stay by my side, Little Butterfly, and let me use you like you promised. " His voice drops, becoming a icy whisper.



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