

Escape

Escape

Grace

" I just felt like... " Tristin trails off and swallows. " coming to see you. "

I don't need to ask how he found me. If he wants to, he can find me anywhere.

I stay still, staring up into his out-of-focus eyes. He is looking right through me as if thinking about something.

My eyes lower to the sleeves of his jacket, getting caught in the drops of water dripping down the edge. I look down at his feet and sigh.

" The rain stopped more than an hour ago. Why are you drenched? " I frown.

Tristin's gaze follows my eyes and lands on the pool of water around his feet. His shoulders slump, making me blink. This is the first time I have seen him like this—dejected and lost.

" I can ask Luca to come up with a suit and— "

I grab the sleeve of his jacket and pull him inside the apartment. The coldness of his hand seeps into my fingers that brush against his skin.

Leaving him standing beside the wall, I close the door and sigh, lowering my gaze to the floor.

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I thought I wouldn't see him again—not for a few years at least.

But I...thought about him more than I like to admit. It's not like I love him or anything, but something about Tristin Roberto makes him unforgettable.

"Go sit on the couch and call Luca." I utter, turning around. "I will make you something hot to drink."

Before I can take a step forward, his arms wrap around my shoulder and waist and tug me back into his body.

My heart leaps to my throat. I freeze, after a long time, and stay like that for some moments to come.

Tristin's forehead drops to my shoulder. He takes a few deep breaths and tightens his grip around me.

I can see the rain starting again through the large ceiling-to-floor window in front of me. It patters against the glass, creating a loud noise that drowns the drumming beat of my heart.

Are you okay? Shall I ask a shallow question like that when I already know the answer?

I swallow, close my eyes and let him hold me, for as long as he needs.

"You left without saying goodbye." Tristin mumbles.

"You were awake and only pretending to be asleep. I know that." Unconsciously, I place my hands over his wrists and just hold still.

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" You could have called. I wouldn't have asked you anything. You could have just called to say Hi. " He pulls his face out of my shoulder and whispers.

I press my lips in a thin line and don't say anything. What was the point of saying Hi to him?

I am just...surprised that he came all the way here when he is suffering. What made him think about me at a time like this when he never came before?

Tristin removes his arms from around me, and the cold air brushes against my drenched back. I step forward, opening my eyes to see the rain still pattering against the window.

It feels like an eternity passed, but it must be only a few minutes of sudden warmth.

From the corner of my eyes, I see Tristin strolling to my couch and staring at it reluctantly. " Maybe I should call Luca first. I don't want to – "

" You can take a bath if you want. " I mumble and rush towards my open kitchen. " my washroom is attached to the bedroom right there. "

Tristin and my gazes lock, and my cheeks flare with heat.

So awkward!

This must be what you feel when you sleep with someone, sneak out on him the next morning, and disappear for three months without a

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word.

I turn my back to him. "Hurry up. I will take your clothes from Luca and give them to you when he comes up."

"Okay." Tristin sighs and I hear him leaving behind me.

I release a breath of relief, my mind drifting to the past.

After coming here, for the first month, I kept thinking that someone might barge inside my small apartment again. I thought the people from my past won't leave me alone.

But no one came.

Not even Tristin. He was true to his words and kept his distance as he promised.

Now that he is finally here, I don't feel fear or uncomfortable. I feel... strangely calm and a little relieved.

This must be my descent into madness.

I shake my head and work on making the hot tea when the bell rings. I move towards the door and open it to reveal Luca's stern face.

"Ms. Whitlock." He addresses me politely.

"Luca." Instinctively, I smile.

"Here are Boss' clothes." He pushes a suit towards me and I grab it before looking at him, wondering what I should do.

"Do you want tea?" I blurt.

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His lips twitch. " thanks for the offer, Ms. Whitlock, but I will have to refuse. I will wait for Boss in front of the building. "

I nod at him eagerly and watch him leave. Double awkward!

I close the door and approach the bathroom. The sound of the shower running on the other sound is in tune with the rain pattering on the glass.

I knock on the door and sigh. " Luca sent your clothes, Tristin. I am putting them on the bed. "

There is no sound of okay from the other side but I still do as I said and go back to the kitchen.

Maybe, I should change my clothes too. I scrunch my nose as I continue with the tea.

My mind keeps drifting to Tristin's face from earlier, and his voice. He ...just doesn't look all right. And can he be when Lily made sure to mess up his whole family?

There must be a storm brewing back at his home, and he is here, instead of staying there. What do I...

A hand reaches over my shoulder and turns off the stove. I feel his warmth behind my back and freeze at the spot again.

" It's burning. " He whispers, his arm still outstretched, and touching my side.

" Oh. " My eyes shoot towards the tea and I gulp. " I will make a new

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— "

" If my presence makes you uncomfortable, I will leave right away, Little Butterfly. You just have to tell me. " His breath fans the tip of my ear.

I stiffen, staring at his arm. " this is your escape from reality. How can I...ask you to leave right now when I know you came here because you just wanted to escape? "

" Do you think I am so weak that I will seek escape from my situation? " Tristin's voice lowers until I can barely hear it. 2

My heart twists inside my chest. I shoot him a look over my shoulder, our noses brushing slightly.

His eyes search mine, his eyelids drooping before he smiles. " Maybe, I am. "

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Not Like Him

Not Like Him

Grace

I don't say anything, just turn my back to him and start brewing tea again.

I should only feel some sympathy for him, and his family...

But I keep doing more than that.

My heart clenches every time that I realize what Tristin must be feeling right now. It hurts more when I think about Alma and Ania. It's sick to feel anything for Alma...but I can't help myself. 1

Tristin stays behind me for a few moments. Then, leaves and sits on the couch.

I shoot him a side glance, watching his lowered head and his fingers brushing his wet hair.

"The...worst fact in life is that..." Tristin murmurs in a low voice. "you can not choose your family."

My parents' faces flash before my eyes. He is indeed right. If I could choose, I would have chosen to be born to anyone but them. I would have chosen anyone as my sibling but Lily.

"If that's not enough...you can't even change their past or go back to make them choose something else." Tristin whispers.

I blink and pour the tea into cups before walking to the lounge.

Not Like Him

Tristin doesn't pick his head, just stares at the floor and takes deep breaths. 1

I take my spot on the other side of the couch, looking at the side of his face, unable to look anywhere else.

" You know... " Tristin pauses to swallow. " when I first got to know the truth about my mother, I left home...but not before yelling at her and calling her names. I...insulted my mother, shouted at her, and didn't stop even when she cried or pleaded with me to listen to her. "

Knowing about their interaction now, it's hard for me to imagine Tristin doing that. He is always...so soft towards his mother that I could have never guessed that he was ever like that to her.

" My father was on his deathbed and he heard every word I told my mother. And...so he died hating my mother. He forbade her and Ania from attending his funeral. He would have disowned them if he had more time to live or maybe, he would have had them killed like he... " Tristin places his hands over his nape and lowers his face some more. " It was...all because of my anger that I couldn't suppress. "

A lump lodges in my throat. I look away and fist my hands in my lap.

" What's stupid is that...my father was the bigger cheater. Throughout his marriage to Mom, he would get drunk, bring women home and fuck them in the room next to my mother's room. When he was done, he would beat up my mother and us for the smallest of mistakes. This was his way of...establishing his power, of telling us that we must obey him like slaves and just a mere rebellion could land us in hell. " He continues.

Not Like Him

Shock ripples through my body. My gaze lands on the side of his face again but I can no longer see it. It's hidden behind his wrist now, and I can't tell the look in his eyes.

" She tried to get a divorce, but...my Mom's parents didn't let her. Powerful people like my father and my Mom's parents wouldn't leave her alone and let her live in peace if she even tried to escape. " Tristin drops his hands in his lap, lifts his head, and directs his gaze at me.

Our gazes lock. His eyes are filled with vulnerability. My shoulders stiffen and instinctively, my hand reaches for his hand.

" She was like you. " He murmurs. " I think that's why...I always felt drawn to you. Your situation was similar to my Mom's but...you, Grace, you didn't do what Mom did. You would never cheat on your husband, no matter what, right? You wouldn't... "

Tristin looks away and pauses. My fingers brush against the back of his hand gently.

" I want to think that Mom destroyed our family but thinking back to how she was treated at her home, by everyone around her, by my father, I can't bring myself to hate her again. After growing up, I find myself accepting her just like she is. I will never shout at her or insult her because she might have done what she did...but she has always been a good mother to Sebastian, me, and Ania. She gave us her best. She protected us as much as she could. She... "

His breath hitches and he lowers his face again. I can sense his struggle. It's eating away at him.

Not Like Him

" I know, Tristin. Alma is a good mother. I understand why you can never hate her. " I whisper, instinctively, gripping his fingers.

" Sebastian protected our family as long as he was alive. He was raised to be this perfect Heir to the business empire, to be the man for our family... " Tristin's voice lowers again. " while he was here... alive...with us...I was free. I could feel bitter about my life all I wanted. I could roam around, and do whatever I needed with my life and no one cared to notice me. "


He talks about his brother as if he has always seen him as his savior.

" After he died, he left me with this responsibility. I was supposed to protect our family. " Tristin murmurs softly. " But I have failed, right? Just like I failed to stop him that day. He preferred death over letting the world know that his sister was the result of an affair and look at me...I am still alive, and sitting here like I am totally fine. Like...I am not ashamed that I failed— "

" Tristin. " I don't know what pushes me to close the distance between and sling my arm around his neck to pull him towards me. " It's not your fault. "

His shoulders go taut under my grip. He stays rigid for a few seconds, then turns to me and rests his forehead in the crook of my shoulder.

" It is. It is my fault. That's why I ran away again and came here. I can not...face my sister. I know she wants me there. She must be waiting for me. But I can't...bring myself to go to her. I am not Sebastian, Grace. I wish I was...but I am not. I can try to be like him, I can

 +20 BONUS

Not Like Him

pretend to be like him but the truth is...that he is dead, and now everything has burned to ashes. "

He doesn't continue, just tightens his arms around me and goes silent.



Comments



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AD is coming