

Fake Pictures

Fake Pictures

Grace

I stare at him for a moment, then avert my gaze to the city view. The lights are still twinkling and everything seems so bright under the dark night but the beauty I saw in this view before is gone.

Maybe, it was not even about the view.

When Tristin was here, even the simple arrangement of the table seemed out of the ordinary.

"He gave you these pictures." Ethan speaks up when I don't say anything for a long time.

I glance at the pictures he has placed on the table and they are the same that Tristin showed me.

"How did you get your hands on—"

"They are fake." Ethan says, his voice dropping.

A cold shiver runs along my spine and I stop myself from shuddering in front of Ethan.

"Some convincing poses, right?" Ethan runs his forefinger down his face on one of the pictures.

I look up, and meet his gaze. "What's the point of it, Ethan?"

"Do you not get it or are you pretending to be dumb?" His eyes

darken, and he pushes the pictures towards me.

But I don't take them.

" He made a fool out of you! These pictures are fake. Were you so blind, Grace that you didn't even want to double-check?! Or did you just want to believe him and think that I am a cheater!?" His voice rises enough to attract the attention of others.

I flinch, glancing around to notice the looks people are throwing my way. This is what he always does—makes a show out of me. I hate that. I have always hated being the center of attention.

" I am sorry. " He lowers his voice when he realizes he is making me uncomfortable.

" But are you? " I wonder, my chest tightening.

" I am. " He whispers.

Our eyes meet, and I find myself staring at him again. " When did you first start turning into this person? "

He grits his jaw, anger clear in the small gesture as he leans in. " You are not listening to me. I didn't cheat on you, Grace. I never touched Lily. Not when I was married to you and not when you left me. "

I do admit—My breath catches in my throat and my heart stops beating. I can't help but look at the pictures, and memories swirl in my head—one after another—more pain, more lies.

But...

" Even if you never touched her... " I whisper, meeting his gaze. " You always thought about her, Ethan. " 1

But...even if it's true that Ethan didn't sleep with Lily, does it mean he didn't cheat at all?

Maybe, he didn't cheat physically. But Lily was always there, in his mind, like a third person in our marriage.

" No, Grace— "

" You chose her over me, every time that you could, Ethan. " The storm in my heart calms as I whisper. " You believed what she told you. You hurt me for her. You wanted to be with her. If my husband is obsessed over another woman but didn't sleep with her, shall I consider his thoughts don't count as cheating? "

He opens his mouth, and his eyes sparkle. I recognize that look. He is about to lie. But he chooses not to.

He goes silent and looks at the pictures as if he is seeing them for the first time.

" Did you not leave my hand to grab her every time she was in trouble? Did you not save her even when you knew she plotted for our child's death and tried to get me raped? " I add, a sardonic smirk touching my lips.

Silence falls between us, and I no longer feel uncomfortable. There is just this...ache inside my chest and it's becoming worse by the moment.

The pictures are fake. Will I be an idiot for believing what Ethan said?

Yes!

I will never repeat the same mistakes. I will ask Tristin, and he will tell me the truth. I will believe whatever he tells me.

"I didn't know she was..." Ethan trails off, his eyes narrowed on the pictures lying on the table.

"Somehow, you figured out Lily was making a fool out of you, right? That she never...loved you." I nod, trying to feel any satisfaction over the truth getting revealed.

But I feel nothing towards Ethan.

I just want to get up and run to Tristin. My heart is restless in my chest.

"I was terrible to you, right?" Ethan murmurs, lifting his gaze to meet my cold eyes.

I scan his face, seeing the hint of agony and longing etched into his features.

"Somehow, I have started to believe we were never really meant to be. We didn't trust each other. We didn't want to open up. You and I, Ethan...were just not suitable. I am not the woman you need and you are not the man I want to be with." I sigh, shaking my head. It's better to admit this today than let this animosity prolong for years.

"You don't know that! I need you. I really—"

" I don't. " I cut him off and say. " I don't need you now, Ethan. "

" I can fix this, Grace. I can fix everything and we can be happy again. " He reaches over the table, for my hands but I pull them in my lap before he can touch them.

He looks taken aback as he glances at his hands that are still hanging in the air.

" I was never truly happy with you. " I confess, in a stable voice.

" That's not true. I did everything to make you happy. " Ethan curls his hands into fists and pulls them back. " I brought you everything you ever wished. You only had to ask once and I would give you everything you needed. "

" Back then... " I blink, my eyes stinging. " I just wanted you to tell me that our marriage was not a temporary arrangement. That's all I ever needed to stop being scared, to stop waiting for Lily's return, to get a good night's sleep without worrying about what might happen to my so-called happy marriage tomorrow. "

He takes a breath and tries to say something but decides against it once more.

" You must be thinking that I should have said so to you. I should have at least shown my...discomfort, right? " I smile sadly and shrug. " but you know what? I couldn't. Even if I was your wife, I never really felt like it. I didn't feel like I could speak about anything to you. I just had to keep telling you that I love you, I had to keep promising a forever I didn't believe in just so you could stop thinking about Lily



and accept me. I tried too hard... "

His eyes are still fixed on me, but I can see everything clearly now. He appears heartbroken and dejected. But I can't bring myself to feel sympathy for him. He brought himself to this point.

" I just...tried too hard, and even if Lily had not returned, I would have become tired, Ethan. I would have become too exhausted to continue. It's the truth. You and I just didn't know when to stop and let go. " A lump forms in my throat as I let out everything to him.

It feels like the wall is finally in place. Ethan and I are on separate sides. We will never be on the same side again—we were never destined to be.

" Stop trying now. " I whisper with a heavy heart. " Stop trying so you don't end up like me. Just accept that I don't love you anymore. And I will never be happy with you. Let go, Ethan, and do things right with another woman. "

Anger swirls in his eyes, behind the agony and he hisses. " Like how you are trying to do everything right with Tristin?! "

Instead of denying it, I nod. " Yes. I am trying my best to do things the right way with him because I want to. "

His lips part, the anger blurring behind hurt once more. " and what does he have that I don't? I have as much money and as much power — "

" He wants to share his happy moments with me. And he comes to me when he is suffering. He puts me before himself and tries to do

better just so that I don't...leave him. " The memory of him showing up at my apartment flashes before my eyes and I smile. " He shares what's hurting him and tells me that I mean something. That I...mean everything. And when he doesn't say it, he shows me. With him, I feel it...I feel that I can do anything in this world. I can reach for the stars and make my way there if I try because he is there to tell me that I can. "

Ethan clenches his fists and averts his gaze to the table. I sigh, and follow his line of sight, my heart filling with so many emotions that I find it hard to name them.

" He tries not to hurt me, Ethan. " I whisper, Tristin's face flashing before my eyes. " He really does try everything he can. I believe... that's why... "

I feel whatever I feel for him.

It's because no one has ever tried to be better for me before.

I am truly pathetic.

But...even if I am pathetic, I want to cling to Tristin.

" Ms. Whitlock. " Luca's voice brings me back to the reality.

My head lifts so I can see Luca strolling towards us. His brows furrow when he notices Ethan sitting there.

" Try to...find someone who loves you for you, Ethan. Stop relying on money and your power. Not everyone is like Lily. One bad experience should not define love for you. It's not love if you just want

someone's money and power. The sooner you understand, the sooner you will find your happiness. " I mutter, before getting up and walking towards Luca.

Before I take the second step, Ethan grips my wrist and stops me. " tell me you don't love me. Look in my eyes and say it. "

I pause, stiffen, and stare at Luca who has come to a stop in front of me. He attempts to get me free of Ethan's hold but I shake my head, telling him to stay out of it.

" He lied to you. He deceived you. How can you still— "

I turn before Ethan can continue. Our gazes lock, and he halts midsentence.

" Ethan Calder... " I blink calmly. " I don't love you. I never will. You are my past, and you will remain that. "

He sucks in a breath but doesn't release it. His wide, glassy eyes search my face, waiting for me to waver but how can I, when I am telling the truth?

I shake off his hand and continue to walk away from him. Luca follows behind, his silent presence giving me a little confidence to hold my head high.

" Can you take me to Tristin? " I ask as soon as we are out of the restaurant.

" Boss is at the hospital— "

" Wherever he is... " I swallow. " please take me to him. "