

Ugly Truth

Chapter 3

Bella

Hidden laughter, mocking smiles, and glares were all I received on Monday. I knew my classmates would react negatively to me dating Marcus. I couldn't understand why they couldn't just live their own lives and not interfere with others. It was Marcus's choice; who were they to judge him and belittle me?

I searched for Ari everywhere. Usually, she was on time, but today she was late. I had visited her at her home yesterday to inquire about her health, and she seemed nice to me. Marcus had also been missing in action lately. He hardly texted me, perhaps because he was busy.

Finally, I spotted Ari approaching me, her brows furrowed and eyes filled with worry. She immediately enveloped me in a tight hug.

"What happened? Are you okay?" I asked her.

"I'm sorry, Bella. I'm really sorry," she said, detaching herself from me.

"For what?" I asked as Ari led me away from the crowd to a secluded place.

She retrieved her phone from her back pocket and handed it to me. On the screen were pictures of me and Marcus, but my face had been photoshopped with a pig. Every single picture was tainted with derogatory comments—calling me fatso, ugly, pathetic, pig, and many more hurtful words that I couldn't bear to read.

I began to hyperventilate, my eyes welling up with tears, making it difficult to see Ari clearly. "Who did this?" I managed to ask.

"How would I know, Bella? Perhaps some of the same fellows who were there too. You know how mean they can be. But look at the bigger picture, Marcus doesn't care about this. In fact, he was looking for you before I came here," Ari said, trying to reassure me.

My breath hitched at the mention of Marcus's name. "Go and find him, and I'll do something to take these images down," Ari suggested before leaving.

Alone now, I felt the hostile stares of the other students burning into me. I couldn't bear to see their mocking smiles or hear their hurtful comments.

So, I ran. I ran as fast as I could.

Who cared what they thought? Marcus liked me for me. He had asked me to be his girlfriend. He came to me. Nothing else mattered. I may not have many friends, but at least I had Ari, and she was enough.

I spotted Marcus with his other friends near the library. Hiding behind a tree, I waited for them to leave. Once they did, I saw Ari approaching him.

"Thank God I found you before she did," Ari said.

"Bella is looking for me?" Marcus asked in confusion.

"Yes," Ari replied, placing her hand on her hip. "I told her you were looking for her. She must be searching for you like a lunatic in the building."

Marcus leaned closer to her. "Why would you do that?"

My brows furrowed and my breath caught as I watched Ariella put her hands on Marcus's nape and draw him closer. "Because it's time you tell her about us," she said.

"You know I can't do that," Marcus replied, though he didn't push Ari away.

What was happening here? My boyfriend and best friend were meeting behind my back.

"Can't leave her?" Ari asked, frustration evident in her tone.

Marcus pulled her closer, their lips mere inches apart. "You don't understand—"

Ari pushed him away. "You didn't hesitate to touch me that night. Have you forgotten already, Marcus?"

"No, no," Marcus said, pulling Ari closer and leaning in to kiss her. Ari kissed him back, and as they did, tears streamed down my face uncontrollably.

I pressed my hand against my mouth, stifling any screams. I couldn't bear to look at them—the betrayal was too much. How could they do this to me?

"Can't believe you are choosing Bella over me!"

"How can I choose Duckling over a hot piece like you?" Marcus exclaimed.

Ariella laughed, her laughter feeling like venom in my ears. She clutched Marcus's hair and kissed him. "Then break up with her when she finds you, and if you succeed, you might get a piece of this hot mess tonight. Trust me, it'll be ten times better than last time," she said, gesturing toward her body.

Marcus playfully smirked at her, and Ariella's laughter filled the air. My legs gave way beneath me, and I found myself collapsing onto the floor. Why had they done this to me? He was my boyfriend, and she was my best friend—my only friend. She knew how I felt about him. She knew everything!

And Marcus? He was good for nothing. Playing with my emotions, I was nothing but a pastime for him. He had eyes for Ariella from the start, so why involve me?

I want answers! I want Ari and him to explain! I'm not going to let this slide easily.

I got up from the floor, hearing some rustling. I turned to look, feeling like somebody had walked away. "Is someone there?" I met with pure silence and wiped the tears from my face.

I stormed to school in fury. Ari was my best friend since kindergarten. I trusted her with everything. If I hadn't seen or heard it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it.

I found her chatting with her friends, laughing, and my heart was bleeding. She truly didn't care about me. Who was this girl? She couldn't be the same girl who was there for me when my father died, who took care of me. What happened to her? What happened to us?

"Ari?" I called her in a low voice.

Teresa acknowledged my presence and signaled Ari. "Bella, you look—"

"I need to talk to you, alone?" Her group circle started whispering around me.

"I truly don't understand why you're still friends with her," Teresa rolled her eyes at me.

"Guys, please." Ariella insisted, and they all left. "I have good news for you, Bella, by some miracle, all the pictures have been taken down." She passed me with a smile, a smile that I now realize was so fake and insincere.

I grabbed Ariella's hand and took her to the parking lot, where she thought no one saw her kissing my boyfriend.

"Bella, why did you bring me here? We could have talked in the cafeteria. What happened to your face? Were you crying? Did something happen with Marcus? Did he say something?"

Wasn't that what you wanted? For Marcus to break up with me? What a great actor you are. Still playing dumb.

"Why, Ariella?" I asked her in a low voice.

"Bell?"

"We were friends, best friends."

Her brows frowned, and she tried to touch my hand, but I pushed her away from me.

"Bella! Have you lost your freaking mind?" Ariella yelled at me. She couldn't bear a small push, and here I was carrying the burden of her betrayal. "You disgust me, Ariella! You are nothing but a traitor. A lying bitch. Someone who sleeps with another's boyfriend." Her eyes widened hearing me.

"What are you saying?"

"Stop! Just stop pretending. I saw it. I saw it all with my own freaking eyes. You and Marcus were here just a couple of minutes ago. I know everything!" I yelled.

Her confused face twisted into a sadistic one. "Fine. Now that you know, it's really over. I'm not going to give you any justification." She looked at her manicured nails, no sign of guilt or remorse on her face.

"Have you no shame? You shameless good-for-nothing!" I yelled at her, and her jaw clenched.

"Just shut your ugly mouth. You said I disgust you? It's you who disgust everyone." She retrieved her phone from her pocket and showed it to me on the front camera. "Look at you. An eyesore for everyone and look at me, everyone wants me. A lying bitch, you said? Yes, I lied a thousand times, telling you that you look pretty or that boys do check you out and you should have some hope. I should have just given you a reality check. And lastly, I didn't force your boyfriend to sleep with me. Now that you have got your answers. Get out and do not show me your face again. It was fun playing with you, Bella."

"Is that what you thought about me all this time?"

She rolled her eyes at me. "It's not my fault that you are ugly and nobody likes you. I felt pity towards you at your father's death, and you came in handy to me in many situations, so I let you befriend me, but your nature of glueing yourself to me was irritating, and I knew I had to show you your place. It was my patience that I bore you for this long."

She began to leave, her steps halting, then walking back to me. "Yes, I lied to you a lot in the past, Bella, but today I will only speak the truth. You are ugly, Bella Harrington. I don't know on what basis your parents named you Bella. Next time, find a friend and boyfriend of your level, and do not forget your place. Ciao!"

As I stood there, reeling from Ariella's cruel words, a numbness washed over me, engulfing me like an icy blanket. Her betrayal echoed in my mind, each syllable a dagger plunging into my heart. Tears blurred my vision, making the world around me seem distant and surreal. My breath came in short, frantic gasps, hyperventilation threatening to consume me. It felt as though the ground had fallen away beneath my feet, leaving me teetering on the edge of an endless abyss.

The weight of despair pressed down on me like a leaden blanket, making it hard to lift my heavy eyelids. Darkness encroached from the edges of my vision, threatening to swallow me whole. In that moment, I felt myself slipping away into an abyss of pain and confusion, unable to find solid ground amidst the chaos of my shattered reality.

"Bella!"