

No Doubt

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Grace

"Have I ever hurt you before, Grace?"

I sit up straight and just sigh again.

Alma shakes her head and takes a seat in the chair Tristin vacated. She places the basket on the bedside table and turns to me.

Her posture is rigid as she starts. "I see that you didn't follow through."

"What?" I clench my hands into fists.

I feel a sense of shame after coming across her and then there is a part of me struggling to not bring up the video and tell her that I feel bad.

"You didn't fulfill your promise. I didn't take you for one to go back on your word." Alma whispers quietly.

My heart sinks. I broke my promise to her. The sense of shame and guilt grows some more.

"I am sorry for not keeping my promise, Alma. Trust me, I wanted to... I tried my best. And I didn't mean to disrespect you." I admit truthfully, hoping that my words will soothe whatever anger she feels towards me.

Alma's eyes droop and the usual polite look displays in them. "It's

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not just about promises, Grace. Now you know the situation our family is in, don't you? We can not afford another scandal. That's why ...I need you to hold your promise, Grace. I need you to stay away from Tristin for the sake of everyone around you, and for his sake. "

I feel a pang of hurt in my heart. Everyone is always asking me to leave something I love behind as if I am born to sacrifice everyone that I hold dear.

But how long can I keep this up?

How much more can I try to understand people and fear backlash?

How far can I go to please them when nothing ever seems to work?

Tristin's face flashes in front of my eyes with each question.

If I was in love with him alone, I would have given up.

But he...says he loves me. He needs me. He is pleading for this connection between us to be anything but one-sided.

How do I break his heart too?

" I am really sorry about the video, Alma. I can not imagine how hard it is for your family right now. " I whisper, my eyes lowering to my trembling hands.

" If you feel sorry, you should— "

" I understand that this is hard for you, Alma. I do. I understand what my relationship with Tristin can result in. I really understand everything and I feel bad for the complicated mess. " I pick up my

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head and stare into her eyes.

"That's—" 1

"But..." I cut her off, as I decide to be selfish, to get what I want in life for once.

"But what?" Alma's eyes narrow.

"I care deeply for Tristin. I don't know if I can just walk away. I can not break his heart, Alma. I can not lie to him and tell him that I don't feel anything for him anymore. I am sorry. I really am. But I am tired of fighting and pretending, Alma. That's why...I am telling you again. I am sorry but I won't be keeping my promise or making any new ones anymore." My fists clench and my hands stop trembling.

Her eyes widen, and she huffs as if she can't believe me. I continue to stare at her, to show her that I am not backing down again.

"I have no desire to cause a rift between you and Tristin. And I...out of all people...will never hurt him. Because I..." My voice lowers, my heart pounding inside my chest wildly. "Because I love him." 1

Alma shakes her head "You don't love him. Your sister—" "

"I don't have a sister. And I will prefer it if you don't compare me to her now, Alma. I told you the truth. I love your son, and I am willing to stay beside him...as long as he wants." It feels like something inside my chest breaks free and the weight over my shoulder disappears.

Alma is angry at me. I understand. But I can not appease her anger right now. I will not give up on Tristin.

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"Do you understand the trouble this can cause?" She whispers, sounding disappointed.

"I am sorry for any trouble I have caused and may cause in the future." I say quietly. "But I want to be with him, no matter what. So whatever you say will not be enough to change my mind."

The room is filled with an uneasy silence. I can see the pain in Alma's eyes, and it hurts to think that I have caused it.

As Alma stands to leave after receiving nothing from me, I feel a deep sense of loss. I hoped for a different outcome, but the reality is harsh. She will never accept me...but it is not enough to make me leave Tristin. ¹

I sit there, my heart heavy with the weight of the decision I just made. Tristin enters the room moments later, his face filled with concern as he sees my lowered head.

"What happened? What did Mom say?" He asks, his voice filled with worry.

"You know what she wanted to say to me, Tristin." I sigh and lay down again.

Perhaps, I should stay in the hospital for a few more days and pretend to be dead for a while.

Tristin's eyes darken. "She asked you to leave me, didn't she?"

"Hm." I nod my head, humming in agreement without any protests.

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"And what did you say?" His voice drops and his breath halts.

"I told her that I can't promise to stay away from you," I admit, and shrug.

He opens his mouth, as if he is about to scold me for agreeing to Alma but when my words register, he goes silent. We stare at each other until his lips twitch and I close my eyes in annoyance.

Is this his perfect timing to smile so smugly?

The moment feels calm and my heart is free until a knock sounds at the door, and Celine comes inside.

Tristin's expression changes as soon as he sees her, and it leaves no doubt.

Tristin is holding something back. And I have to find out what it is.



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