

Can't Hurt Back

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Grace

"Leave me alone! I don't want to see you. You are not my brother!" I halt in my way when I hear Ania screaming from the other side of the door.

"Ania, I am still your—"

"You are a liar! You knew what Mom did. You knew everything and you didn't—you didn't tell me. You all must be laughing behind my back, waiting for the perfect moment to ruin my life." She yells, before something heavy drops on the floor.

I flinch, shooting Luca a side glance. He doesn't say anything, but I know he also thinks it's a terrible time for me to go in.

With a heavy heart, I walk away from the door and take a seat on the bench in the corner of the corridor.

I shouldn't have come here. I should have waited for him at home.

But...I still can't bring myself to move, to just go away.

Because it feels like my head will explode if I don't see him soon or if I am not close enough to reach out to him.

Luca stays outside the hospital room, his expression stiff while I stare at him. Occasional noises sound from inside, echoing in the empty hall.



Tristin said things were not that serious but I am only realizing what he is dealing with. And yet, he still...found the time to think about me instead of pushing me to the sidelines.

I rest my head against the wall and watch as doctors rush into the room after a while of crashing and screaming noises.

The scene inside the room comes into my view for a moment and it has my heart clenching painfully.

Ania is thrashing wildly while yelling at Tristin and he is just standing there, unable to say anything. Alma stands in the corner, her hand pressed to her mouth as she suppresses her sobs.

My gaze lingers on Ania's bandaged wrists before the door closes.

Did she...try to kill...herself?

I rub my sweating palms down my dress. Now, I feel even more selfish to be here.

Sighing, I rise from my spot. Luca walks towards me swiftly, knowing that I am ready to leave as there is no point sitting out here and burdening Tristin with my affairs right now.

"Ms. Whitlock, let me escort you—"

Luca's words cut short when the door behind him slides open. Guilt surges to my throat, making me stiffen.

Luca steps aside, leaving my way and my eyes land on Tristin who is standing in the doorway.



Our gazes lock, and I take a step back. "I...I am just leaving."

As I stare at his ruffled hair, and reddened eyes...I realize something that I didn't before.

When Ethan told me that Tristin lied and deceived me, it broke my heart. I didn't want to imagine Tristin doing that to me.

And then...I thought...even if he did something like that...

I might never find it in my heart to get angry at him. This thought—this one truth is scarier than anything I have ever encountered in my life.

If Tristin hurts me, I will not be able to hurt him back.

I swallow, averting my gaze from his eyes and turning my back to him. How did it come to this?

Hurriedly, I walk away so he can not say anything or see the inner conflict that's eating me up.

But my efforts prove to be in vain.

Before I can round the corner and disappear, two arms wrap around my waist and tug me back into a warm chest. My running heart calms in my chest and goes still for a moment.

"Don't...go." He whispers, dropping his forehead on my shoulder.

It feels like déjà vu. He held me like this when the scandal broke out and he suffered all alone.

I lift my hand and place it over his wrist. He tightens his hold around me.

" I...lied. " Tristin murmurs.

My hand freezes, my body turning to lead against him.

" I told you they will get over it. That was a lie. Ania will never get over it. Mom won't either. And I... " He whispers against my skin, his breaths slow and shaky. " and I think I will have to spend the rest of my life trying...to fix things. "

" But it's not your fault. " I blurt, and run my thumb down the back of his hand. " why would you fix something you didn't break, Tristin? "

He lied to me, he says. I wonder why I can't seem to process that.

Tristin stays silent, and I stay there, letting him hold me once again. He is true to his words—he really does seek me when he is suffering. So how do I...think about leaving him?

" Are you angry? " Tristin murmurs, kissing my neck gently.

" N—No. " My cheeks warm.

Luca must be watching.

" Why were you leaving then? You came for me, didn't you? " He leans back and turns me in his arms so we are facing each other.

My gaze flickers towards Luca and I find his back towards us. Thank God.



Tristin's fingers stroke my cheeks, his gaze fixed on my face. "I was scared you would think my family is too much of a mess, and it might make you run from me."

"Why would I do—"

"Because you might think Mom will somehow pressure me into giving up on you or I might develop some sense of guilt and refrain from causing another scandal about you and me." He interrupts, wording what's been on my mind.

My nose scrunches. He always knows what I am thinking.

"So...will you do that?" I ask, unconsciously stepping closer to him.

"No. Once I love someone, I don't really fall out of love." Tristin hums, his gaze lowering to my pursed lips. "It will be you and me... forever, even if you decide to leave me someday."

Forever. I have promised it to others many times, but I ended up far away from them. The promise of forever scares me now...but...he sounds so sincere.

"And? You will let me go? Just like this?" I wonder, tilting my head to the right.

"I..." Tristin shrugs. "I don't know."

My eyes roam down his face, taking in his soft eyes, and parted lips. I smile and step back.

"We shouldn't be discussing this right now. You should go back to

your family. They need you, Tristin. "

He grabs my arm and pulls me back in. " stay. "

My eyes widen. " if they— "

" Wait for me. We will go home together. Can you do that? " He whispers, and looks down, at my injured wrists. " Or maybe you should go home. You need rest so your wrists— "

" I will stay. I am going to sit there. " I blurt, shaking his hand off and walking towards the spot where I sat before.

Tristin looks dumbfounded and stares at me for a long time before he shakes his head. " Luca, look after her. "

" Yes, Boss. " Luca nods right away and comes to stand beside me.

Tristin walks back to the room and I lean back against the wall, staring at the door silently.

He can wait for me for hours. I want to do the same for him.

Whatever he does for me, I want to return it tenfold.

But...my heart is still sinking.

I will not bring up the pictures right now. Maybe someday else, I will ask him and he will tell me that Ethan was lying. Everything will be fine.

But if he says that Ethan was telling the truth...

I don't know what I will feel then and I don't want to think about it.



I close my eyes, giving my exhausted mind some rest. Doctors rush in and out of the room before they leave for good, hinting that the situation inside is in control.

After a long time, the door opens, footsteps approach and someone comes to sit beside me. Strangely, I have started to recognize her with her cologne and I no longer need to look at her to know she is there.

"You know how my family is breaking apart. It's all because of Lily." Alma mutters, her voice carrying bitterness.

"Lily had no right to reveal that secret but for once...you should admit that such a secret shouldn't have existed in the first place, Alma. I can't imagine what you went through to decide to do something like this but...Ania had the right to know the truth."

I open my eyes and turn my head in her direction. She is staring at the floor, as tears flow down her cheeks freely.

My heart hurts for her but...what can be done now?

"If you had managed this better, things wouldn't end like this. It's no one's fault but your own. Still...I am sure your children will forgive you for it, Alma. Because they know their mother loves them more than anything in this world." My voice softens towards the end.

"They don't believe that. They hate me." She surprises me with her words and lowers her face.

I shake my head. "they can not deny that you have always been a

good mother to them. If you were not, they would have known...like I do. "

She picks up her head and looks at me. "you—"

" I am not an expert at family affairs. But I believe it will take some time and...Ania will come around. Because you might be a not-so-good wife...but you are a great mother. " I avert my gaze to the door to watch Tristin strolling out of the hospital room.

Instantly, I rise from my spot, ready to go to him when Alma grabs my wrist and stops me.

" You will not break my son's heart, right? " She blinks, wiping her cheeks with the back of her hand.

I look at her, then at Tristin who is approaching me with a frown between his brows.

I nod. " I won't hurt him. "

Alma lets go of me and doesn't say anything else.

" Come on. Let's go. " Tristin stops in front of me and shoots his mother a side glance before leading me out of the hospital.

" How is Ania— "

" I heard you met Ethan earlier. " Tristin interrupts before I can ask him about his sister. And my heart sinks when I notice the dejected look on his face.