

Umbrella

Grace

" Mrs. Calder, choose wisely. Don't make mistakes. " Josh follows after me.

I halt and shoot him a glance over my shoulder. His eyes are hard on me, but when his gaze meets someone else's eyes behind me, he swallows and takes a cautious step back.

Instantly, I whip around to find Tristin staring at him coldly. The lust for violence behind his eyes is well-masked but it still sends shivers down my back.

" Let's leave. " I whisper, drawing Tristin's attention back to me.

He nods curtly and turns around. His hand closes around my wrist again, silently tugging me along.

Frowning, I keep my eyes on his hand. I should probably tell him that I can walk on my own.

I can walk even if my legs are trembling, even if my hands are turning cold and my heart is sinking.

I was a fool to think Ethan was fighting to keep me. For a second there, when I found him clinging to me desperately, I thought...maybe, I am mistaken about some things.

Maybe, just maybe, Lily brainwashed him. And Tristin is turning me against him.



Maybe, there is no betrayal between us, but just misunderstandings.

Now, the harsh truth hits me in the face.

The moment Lily fainted—or better—pretended to faint, I disappeared from Ethan's world. ¹

I had spent years beside Ethan. Whenever I came across him, it was always like this. The moment Lily came into his sight, his eyes became soft and he forgot I existed.

That day when he pushed me, he forgot I existed even then and left me on the road to bleed out. How can I ever forget?

Warm hands fall over my shoulders. My trance breaks. Slowly, I lift my head.

Tristin is standing right before me, his eyes fixed on something around my arms. I peek down, only to notice his big coat wrapped around my frame, hiding my silk nightie.

" Don't catch a cold. " He says, without taking his eyes off his coat.

Suddenly, it dawns upon me. Indeed, I am cold. It feels like my bones are freezing.

Craning my neck, I look up at the sky. The clouds rumble before it starts raining.

I push past Tristin and walk ahead. " we should leave. "

Who knows if Ethan will suddenly remember me and come after me again?

“ We should leave, Tristin. ” I repeat, as my mind is pulled into a daze again.

A man comes rushing from the distance, holding an umbrella. That’s when I realize that I am under the rain. The cold water is drenching me, but I can’t seem to be able to feel it.

He moves past me swiftly and approaches Tristin. “ Boss. ”

Tristin snatches the umbrella from him and lifts it above my head. Instantly, the cold water stops wetting me. I glance up, as several emotions raise their head inside me.

Grabbing my cold hand, Tristin hands me the umbrella and steps away. “ Come on, Grace. ”

I continue to stare at the umbrella.

It all started with an umbrella.

The first time I met Ethan in the garden of my house, he had covered me with an umbrella just like this.

On that winter day, my parents broke my heart again when they took my poem and gave it to Lily so she could participate in a contest.

As I cried in the garden alone, an unfamiliar boy had come to save me from the rain. His eyes were cold, unlike anything I had seen before, but the green of his eyes drew me in.

“ Crying under the rain won’t solve anything. ” He had said. “ you will only get sick and you will be surprised to know that no one gives a damn. So, you should. Give a damn about yourself. ”

After he had said those strange words to me, he handed me the umbrella and left. He had seemed so cool back then. He was my first crush. Then, he became an incurable illness—my first love.

But for him...

I never existed.

He was right.

No one gave a damn about me.

The umbrella slipped from my hand and fell to the ground. The rain started pouring over me again.

My gaze fell to the ground. I was not wearing shoes. I had forgotten to wear shoes...because I was so engrossed in whatever those people did to me.

"How...funny." I mumble.

"You are a stubborn one." A pair of black shoes comes into my view, making me blink.

"You just got out of the hospital. Do you want to go back again?" Tristin scoffs, his tone hard.

"I—"

Before I can find any words to say to him, he bends down. My jaw hangs low in surprise as he picks me up in his arms bridal style.

Immediately, my eyes find his face. He doesn't spare me a glance as he walks towards his car.



His lips set in a hard line, his jaw clenched. Is he angry? Why?

His masculine cologne clings to him like a second skin, making me hold my breath.

Because of me, he has gotten drenched in the rain. His hair cling to his forehead now, shadowing the dangerous look in his eyes.

My frown deepens.

Tristin's man opens the passenger door. He sets me inside and closes the door before moving to the other side.

I sigh, glancing down at my dripping clothes and the expensive leather seats. This is not good.

"I am going to ruin your car." I murmur, as Tristin slips in beside me.

"Do you think I care about that?" He says, closing his eyes and resting his head behind.

"But we should at least try to—"

"Luca, turn on the heat. Ms. Whitlock catches cold easily." He mumbles, without opening his eyes.

I close my mouth and suffice with staring at him. How thorough was his background check on me?

My eyes take in his white button-down shirt, now clinging to his skin, displaying his perfectly built body with six-pack-abs.

My cheeks warm at the sight. I turn my gaze to the window.

Luca, the man in the driving seat turns the heat on max and starts the engine. Not so surprisingly, no one comes in our way as we drive out of the Estate and leave Ethan and his tantrums behind.

My eyes follow the sight of the big house until we are far away from it. A bitter taste invades my mouth as I sigh and look ahead.

The awkward tension keeps rising in the space. The man sitting beside me seems exhausted and keeps silent.

Unconsciously, I unclench my fingers and look at the phone still held in my hand. It's a little wet, but it's working to my relief.

I lost myself for some time there and completely forgot about it. Heaving a breath of relief, I wipe the phone's screen with my fingers.

"Were you scared?" Just when I think Tristin won't speak again, he surprises me.

"What?" I whisper, a little jumpy to my liking.

My gaze rises to his face again. His hair still clings to his forehead, covering half of his slightly open eyes.

I swallow as our eyes meet. Right now, his eyes don't have that dangerous look in them. He appears lazy and sleepy.

"Were you scared?" Tristin asks.

Scared? I recall the way I found Ethan in the penthouse, and was forced to bleed out until I fainted.

Yes, I was scared. So scared that Ethan might win, might keep me

hostage, might turn me into a mistress and I won't be able to do anything. The helplessness scared me. 1

A lump clogs my throat, making it difficult to breathe.

"It won't happen again." Tristin whispers, his voice deep and hoarse.

Our eyes meet again. He is staring at me, with something strange in his gaze.

My heart misses an odd beat. "What?"

"Ethan won't get his hands on you again. As long as you choose to be with me, no one will hurt you again, Little Butterfly." He says effortlessly and then closes his eyes.

My eyes widen on him, as I try to digest his words. He only means our deal. I don't need to think too much about it, I assure myself.

But, my hands still sweat as I continue to stare at him openly. Who is this man?

"Where are we going?" I ask, swallowing the lump in my throat.

"My Home." Tristin replies, stealing away my breath. 1



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