**FALLING IN GRACE**

We all knew it was coming. Gramps lied on what would later be called his deathbed. As he lay there, reminiscing on his past, the family sat in the living room arguing. They knew it was coming, and they wanted the treasure. Gramps had always talked of a treasure hidden in the land. Now that it looked like Gramps' end was coming everyone was shouting over who was going to have it*.*  I sat right in the middle of them. I listened to each one curse about the other and mumble under their breath the plan they were executing to claim the treasure for themselves.

“Oliver, why don’t you just shut your trap? Your plan is horrible. Listen to mine. I am going to find all the treasure, by using this plan,” I highly doubted my Gran Gran had a better idea than her husband.

*Is my family really this greedy? Was she really going to take all of the treasure, for herself? Really?*

“Oh both of y’all just shut it. If anyone is going to find the treasure it is going to be. I will finally be rich,” I rolled my eyes. My uncle was so pathetic, with his greedy look always plastered on his face.

*Did he really think he was going to find the treasure?*

“I think this should just stop. We all know I am going to find the treasure. That is such a no brainer. Don’t you think so Estella Grace?”

“Yes of course Mom.”

*That is of course if I didn’t find it first. Just because I am a kid do they really think I am not capable? These people are ridiculous. How selfish could someone be? I just want to find the treasure because… Well, to prove a point.*

“See what I told you. Estella Grace even agrees with me.” I smiled in the direction of my mom.

“Your point? She is just a little kid.” Gran Gran looked at me with an I-thought-you-were-on-my-team look.

*Did she really think I was on her team? I am on nobody’s team, until they stop calling me a little kid. If only I could leave and just find the blasted treasure.*

The door slammed shut, and everyone went quiet. Jerking my head back, I waited to see who it was.

*Oh thank the Lord. Finally, someone who can talk some sense.*

Cane came around the corner, and stopped right when he saw me. Everyone waited impatiently for him to speak. "Estella, can I speak to you? Alone." I nodded, and everyone exchanged "ooh's" and love struck smiles. Everybody knew we had a liking for each other.

*It was a really awkward relationship. He was my fifth cousin that had been three times removed. Just because we didn’t want to do the whole illegally date your somewhat distantly related cousin because he was good looking, we didn’t call each other cousins. We didn’t even call him a part of the family anymore.*  I walked outside with Cane, standing right in the middle of driveway.

    "Cane what's the deal? I was listening to their dumb plans, so this better be good!" I turned to walk back in, but he grabbed my arm turning me back. I jerked away from his grasp. He may have been my type, but I was not about to start a relationship in this mess of a family.

    "Curiosity killed the cat." Cane was using a singsong voice.

    "Satisfaction brought it back." I sang back, in a ha-ha-I-beat-you type voice.

    "Well then, I best get to it. I have a plan, and it's a smart one. Very intelligent. You want to hear it?" Cane winked at me.

    "I don't like teasing! Spit it out already!" I glared at him.

    "Don't get your panties in a wad.”

*He really didn’t just say that phrase. What does it even mean?*

“All right here's the plan, we need to talk to Gramps. Those nimrods in there won't ever find the treasure. We are the oldest of the grand kids, well at least you are. I am not technically related anymore,”

*Thank the Lord you are not related anymore, or this would be ten times more awkward.*

“Anyway we are the oldest, and we can out smart all of the adults in there. We will need to get in to his room, and we need to be alone. We will ask where it is, and if we are lucky he will give us some kind of hint. Do you understand the plan, Estella?"

“Yes I understand. I will be the one to get into his room, but first I need to do something.”

I ran back into the house before Cane could say another word. I went to the yellow room that the closet, in which I kept my clothes and other trinkets that I could never bring myself to get rid of, was held. That’s where I found it.

I dressed myself in a hounds tooth trench coat, and a bubble pipe sticking out the corner of my mouth. I couldn’t just walk through the living room without being bombarded with questions about my present outfit, so I managed to jump out the window and run around back.

I met Cane just where I left him. “Well don’t you just look stellar, Estella.” I gave him a half smile, and looked him up and down. He was wearing a red and white-stripped shirt with matching socks. I wanted to tell him he looked like Waldo.

“And you look as sweet as a candy cane, Cane.” He winked at me, and shooed me off into the direction of the window leading to Gramps room. I climbed through the window taking care not to make a sound. The room was dimly lit, and stifling hot. The floor had stains on it, and the paint on the wall was peeling. Gramps lie there on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. I walked over to him and took his ice-cold hand. He gripped it tight, and looked over to see who I was. Getting real close to my ear, he whispered something.

“I knew you would come, Estella Grace. I know what you seek, and I am willing to give it to you. Listen closely what you seek will be found through a frame showing the message written in the stars a million miles away.” He got his last word out, before his hand slumped from mine to the side of the bed. The color had left his face, and his chest had stopped the steady up and down movement.

I sat there shaking, sobbing into his chest with my arms wrapped around his shoulders. I didn’t want him to leave. Death may be graceful and it may even be beautiful, but to me it was devastating.

*Why do the people you love dearly have to leave your life? It seems so quick. Death is like a black cape swiping through the air so quickly you just see the disturbed dust particles in the air float. Alone. No one there, but the remains of a quick and devastating death.*

I climbed out of the window. I tried to stop crying, but the tears just kept flowing.

Turning he corner, I found Cane kicking at the ground. Once he saw me crying, he knew what had happened. He gave a nod, and pulled me into a hug. I felt his tears land on my head, trickle down into my hair, and onto my cheek. After we recovered ourselves, we separated and got right down to business.

“So what did he say? Did he give us a clue?” Cane looked at me with puppy dog eyes. I sighed, and wiped the tears of my face.

“Don’t get your knickers in a wad. The hint he gave us was… Are you sure you want to hear?” I winked at him (*did I really just say that phrase*), and he just gave me a stop-playing-games look. “He said, that what I sought would be found through a frame showing the message written in the stars a million miles away. That is what he said. I think I know where he is talking about, but I would need to go to check. Nobody knows of this place, but I do.”

“I would say that he meant the skylight, but that doesn’t mean anything. What do you think?”

*Why did he seem to have all the blasted answers? I thought that was my little place.*

“Since when have you known about the skylight? Yes, that is where I thought he was talking about. I guess it is to the barn for a night. Let me go tell my mom I am staying the night with Gemini in the barn. She needs to be fed anyway.” I ran inside making sure to leave my trench coat and bubble pipe with Cane.

I walked into the living room, and stopped for about a second. “I am going for a night in the barn, Ma!” I turned to run out the door, but got called back before I could reach the door.

“Estella Grace, get your butt back in here.” I trudged back into the living room, while dragging my feet across the floor. I stood right where I was previously, and waited for someone to say something. My Gran-Gran was the first to speak.

“Why the hell are you going out there tonight?” She stood up and walked over to the fire, where she threw more wood in. My Gran-Gran was always a sour person, trying to get into everyone’s business. She really should get a life. My Papaw stood up, but only to speak (he was always on my side).

“Angelina this is not your discussion. This matter is between Estella and her mother.” He sat back down, and Gran-Gran kept her mouth shut (surprisingly), until I was done explaining to my mom why I was going out to the barn for the night.

“Be safe, and stay out of trouble down there! Bring the gun too. Love you.”

“Okay Mom. Love you too.” After grabbing the revolver siting on top of the fridge, I walked out the door.

On my way to the barn, I walked with Cane right by my side. Coming close to the barn, I saw our horse Gemini. While making an attempt to run over to her, I tripped over a root. Cane rushed over, and gave me a hand.

“Thanks.” I blushed, and tilted my head down smiling at the ground.

“You’re quite welcome. \*Cough\* klutz…” He always had to say the right words to make me laugh. I lifted my head up giving a slight smile, and then I gave a burst of laughter throwing my head back letting my hair sway in the wind. Cane stared at me.

“You’re beautiful.”

When he said that, it took me by surprise. I stopped laughing and just stared in awkward silence.

“Gemini should be fed. She is bound to be hungry.”

“Right… I will go get the feed ready. You can lead her up to the barn.” Cane ran off towards the barn, leaving me with Gemini. She was an all black horse, with a long silky mane. I walked over to her, grabbing a hold of her halter. I felt something underneath her halter, but I disregarded it. *I am probably just not thinking straight.*

“Did you hear that Gemini? He thinks I am beautiful.” I turned to look at the horse, and noticed that I was talking to a horse!

“What am I thinking talking to a horse about my relationships? I think I am losing it!”

The horse neighed in return, causing me to turn and look at it with confused eyes.

*Did this thing just respond to me?* I shook my head. *This can’t be happening… I must be imagining things.*

I pulled Gemini along, finally reaching the barn. The trough was waiting full of food, with a bucket of water sitting beside. I walked Gemini into the stable, and locked the door behind.

Cane sat there on a bucket leaning against the wall. He was watching my every move. I walked over to him slowly. Pacing myself with short steps.

He sat there raising a hand for me to pull him up. I knew he didn’t need my help, but I grabbed his hand pulling him up anyway.

“You can let go of my hand now.” I looked over at him, only to see him staring at the setting sun with a slight smile.

“No, just look at the sun.” I rolled my eyes and I tensed my hand, but relaxed as my eyes caught a glimpse of the sunset. It was beautiful. It was a golden orb swimming in a sea of colors being cut slowly by the horizon. I watched as the blues, the violets, the pinks, and the reds all danced like ballerinas forming different shapes around the golden orb.

“Beautiful. Isn’t it?” I waited for a reply, but didn’t receive one. I got the answer from silence, as we stood there watching it disappear.

Once the sun lay hidden, we turned to face the barn in which the skylight waited for us. I walked over to the door, and stopped right in front of it staring through the dusty window. Opening the door, I listened to it creek.

“You know you are still holding my hand.” Cane looked over at me, and winked.

“I know.” I gripped his hand tighter, and walked through the door. The inside of the barn was cluttered, and had a cold eerie feel. Hatchets and hammers were hanging by a string from the ceiling; it was as if we had walked into a horror film. Every turn we took I expected to find a man with a machete lurking. We came to the stairs.

“Why did you pull my arm? I was about to walk up the stairs. That is where the skylight is… You should know!” I took my arm away from Cane’s grasp, and rubbed the red spot where it had been pulled.

*Ow. That really hurt. Well, this is going to leave a mark.*

“I just think that these stairs aren’t going to be safe. Please, don’t go up them. There is another way.”

“I always go up these stairs, and that is not about to change. Awww is Cane scared? Buk Buk Buk!!! Chicken.” I winked at him and turned to walk up the stairs.

CREEK CREEK CREEK…

“Ahhhhhhh!!! Help me! Please Cane!” My feet dangled, as I held on to the stair that was still functional. I looked down to see about ten feet below me.

*Could I jump? Nah he will save me right.*

“Come on help me!!!!!”

“Coming! Oh wait… I think you owe me an apology. What do you say?”

“Help I can’t get up!!!! Ha ha ha ha!!!! No really, get your butt over here and help me!!! That’s what I say!”

“What do you say? I will give you a hint it starts with an S.”

“Sh@t!!! I am slipping!” One of my hands slipped off the stair, and dangled at my side.

“Wrong S word.”

“Fine! I am sorry.”

“Louder. I can’t hear you!!!”

“I am sorry!!!”

Cane carefully tiptoed up the first few steps, and reached a hand out for me to grab. Pulling me up, he laughed at me.

“I told you so.”

*I could have had some smart comment for that, but I decided to be nice. After all he did just save my life, or at least my legs capability to walk.*

“Thanks.” We started walking the long way.

“I didn’t think you knew that kind of language.”

“I didn’t either. It was because I was scared, and I told you time and time again I don’t like your teasing.”

“ Oh, so it’s just my teasing. I’ll remember that next time.”

“You may remember, but you will still do it. It is a way to get under my skin. It’s like tickling.”

“Oh so your…”

“Don’t even think about it.”

“Too late, I already thought about it. In fact I am still thinking about it.”

“Stop…” I gave him a small glare.

“Look we are here now.” I walked ahead of him, and entered the vacant spaced room. The skylight was the only thing the room consisted of. It was located in the center of the ceiling. The sky was dark, and the stars were shining bright. I went and lay right beneath the skylight. For the longest time, I stared. Cane eventually came to join me. Twiddling something in his pocket, he sighed.

“What’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“That thing you are twiddling with in your pocket.”

“Oh nothing.”

“Why do you do that?”

“Again. Why do I do what?”

“You know, never tell anyone about your feelings. Why did you even want to find the treasure? This isn’t your family… Not technically.”

He sat up, so I sat up with him. “I know what it is like. My family was like this when my gramps died. They never were a family again. I don’t want that to happen to your family.” He pulled out a pocket watch. He continued to pass it through his hands running his fingers across each curve.

“That was the treasure wasn’t it?”

He nodded. “He slid it in my hand, with his last breath. Why do you want the treasure?”

“They treat me like a kid. I want to show them that I can do anything they can.” I looked over at Cane. He was standing.

*Man this boy is a wiggle worm. One minute he is lying, and then he is sitting. When you finally think he is done, he is standing.*

I then stood up as well. His hair glimmered in the moonlight. He was very good looking. Tall, skinny, and not too muscular. He was just right, in my eyes.

He turned facing me, and once again we just stared. I caught him staring at my lips, and before I knew it he leaned forward and planted a kiss on the right corner of them.

He parted from the kiss, only coming inches away to speak. He was so close; I could feel his breathe on my skin. “Promise me. That you won’t tell anyone that we found the treasure.” I wrapped my arms around his neck, and crossed my fingers.

“I promise.” He embraced me in a hug, and gave me a kiss on the top of my head.

“Let’s take a look at this skylight shall we?”

“We shall.” I looked up, and found a single constellation in the frame. It looked like twins to me.

*So that’s why he named the horse Gemini. He wanted the hint to connect to her. The Gemini’s symbol is the twins. This makes perfect sense.*

“Is that?” I turned to see the same face that I had on Cane.

“It is.” We ran back outside. Avoiding the stairs this time.

“Gemini. There you are. Right where we left you.” I put my hand under her halter as I did before, and felt around. I found it. It wasn’t me imagining after all, it was a key. The key had been hidden there the whole time.

“Here’s the key Cane. I know where it goes.”

“Oh do you now? Where?”

“Are you sure you want to know?”

“Oh look who’s the teaser now.” He gave me a push, making me step in horse poop.

“Bloody h-e- double hockey sticks. Look what you made me do.” He started coming closer forcing me to have my back up against the wall.

*Bad idea.*

He started tickling me. I laughed so hard I couldn’t breathe.

“Just out of curiosity, since when have you been British? First knickers, and now you are cursing at me in their language.” He continued tickling me. I wiggled under his arms, and stood on the other side of Gemini.

“Bad habit. And the key goes to, his abandoned shop in the back forty. It’s right back there. Don’t ask me how I know, I just do.” We ran to the back forty. We came across many fallen trees, and dried up creeks. I stopped walking, when I reached about half way. It was still dark, and I really didn’t want to go into a creepy old shop right now.

“What’s the matter Estella?”

“I admit it. I am scared.”

“There is no reason to be scared. Come on take my hand.” His hand was so warm compared to mine. He led me to the door.

While trying to put the key in, my hand shook. I turned the key slowly listening to the click of the lock. He put his other hand on top of mine, and turned the doorknob. I kicked the door open.

Nothing happened. Cane walked in first, but I stood there like a gazelle getting ready to run.

“Come on its ok.” He searched the wall for a light switch. We both chorused in on a few oohs and aahs. The room was filled with treasure. Glittering like moonlight on water, gold and silver covered the floor. We walked around picking up every jewel, and examining it with a look of amazement.

In the center of the jewel filled shop, I saw a small wooden chest. Lifting the hood, I found a necklace and a picture. It was Gramps and Grams. They were young, and the picture was faded. The necklace that lay beside it was a diamond necklace with a pattern of blue sapphires reading the word Grace in the center.

*Gramps always called me Estella Grace.*

The beauty of the necklace caused my eyes to swell with tears. I picked it up caressing each jewel that was placed so perfectly. Cane took it from my hands, and put it around my neck.

We marveled over the treasure. Sun shown through the tiny window in the corner. The sun was rising, and I knew it was time to go home.

*I found it. I can go tell my family now, and prove to them my worth. But wait… Cane thinks I made him a promise. I don’t care. I need to do this. My family needs to know that I am capable and smart enough to find this blasted treasure. I need to tell them, and who said Cane will ever find out.*

I ran in the direction of the house, telling Cane nothing. He tried hard to catch up with me but I made it to the house with a few minutes to spare, before Cane arrived. I entered the living room finding the family arguing like always. My chest was heaving. I was trying to catch my breath.

“What’s wrong hon?” My mom looked at me with worried eyes.

“I found it… I found the treasure.” Everyone stood up at the sound of those words.

“I see that.” My mom pointed at the necklace around my neck.

*Oh shoot I forgot to take the necklace off.*

They all walked slowly towards me. My aunts and uncles each saying tell us where it is my love.

“Why the hell would she tell you? Tell me my darling.” My Gran-Gran smiled and came closer and closer. They all asked trying to get it out of me. They wanted it for themselves. Even my own parents were sweet talking me. I was scared.

I quickly ran out of the house running into Cane. He asked me what I was doing but I didn’t reply. I just ran. Coming to the middle of our yard, I searched for the tallest tree. I found it sitting by the fence, it was covered with autumn leaves. I ran over to it, and climbed to the next to the top limb. My family had followed me out with Cane right behind them.

“You promised.” Cane mouthed the words he wanted to yell at me.

I showed him my crossed fingers, and he looked at me with a how-could-you look. Tears trickled down my face.

*What’ve I done?*

My family reached the bottom of the tree. They did not take turns yelling at me, for they did it at once. I wasn’t listening though; I was just trying to stay away. Taking the necklace off my neck, I gripped it firmly in my hand.

I went to go step onto the top limb, but then a rock was thrown at me to get my attention.

“Ow!” I turned to look at who threw the rock, but lost my footing.

I was falling. It was felt like I was being filmed in slow motion. I pulled the necklace close to me, and I realized I had time to think about what was happening as I watched the autumn leaves dance above my head*.*

*How could I have been so selfish? So what if they called me a little kid and said that I can’t do anything. I filled myself up with what I wanted. I never thought about what was best for others, what was best for Cane. I turned into the people I said I would never. I was acting like my messed up family. I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. I was filling myself with selfishness, just like they have been doing for years.*

*I knew I had made a mistake, by spilling my guts. I also knew I wouldn’t be making it to church tomorrow, so I could pray for my sins. I thought about everything I would miss. No prom, no college, no kids, no life. Only death.*

*Dear Lord,*

*Please forgive me for my wrongdoing. And please, please, please let Cane know I am truly sorry. I love him, and I always will. I love Cane Wright.*

*P.S. What does it feel like to actually die? What sounds will a make when I reach the ground? I don’t want to die. I want to be here. I want to stay with Cane.*

I answered my own prayers.

*I guess this it was it feels like to die slowly. It’s like I am falling in grace.* I dropped the necklace letting it fall gracefully to the ground.

*Falling in grace. That has a nice ring to it.*

I wondered where the necklace was going to end up, and what was going to happen to the treasure, but I figured Cane would take care of that.

Slightly turning my head, I watched Cane cry, I watched the children scream, and I watched the adults fill with silent guilt. As I came closer to the ground, I knew it was coming.

*Cane swore not to tell. I betrayed his trust; I would be taking the secret to the grave*.

***Thud.***