

136 I will step in.

Ryan jolted awake. Cold sweat beaded on his forehead as his chest heaved. His eyes darted to look around, struggling to adjust to the dark silence of his condo. The empty bottles lay splayed on the floor, evidencing his state. The remnants of the dream clung to him, so vivid and unrelenting, as if he could still see the scene unfolding before him. 1

The sight of Arwen intertwined in another man's arms horrified him. She looked so ... content, more at peace and happy than he had ever remembered her. *But how could she be so happy with someone else? Who was that man? Was he the same one he had seen that day outside the hospital?* 1

As he tried to figure that out, another flash of the dream surfaced in his vision—of that man. In his nightmare, he held her so close, with a soft, devoted look in his eyes, charming her into his chasm. And she was there happily following his lead, ready to surrender everything she had held precious to herself.

How could she?

He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to shake the image, but the emotions from the dream —the way she had looked at this man with a warmth in her gaze —refused to fade.

Ryan took a deep breath, rubbing his hand over his face as he tried to steady himself. "It was just a nightmare," he muttered, but couldn't bring himself to believe, given how real it felt.

Something very similar to jealousy felt like gnawing at his heart, raw and piercing, cutting through any denial he had harbored since she had left.

He reached for his phone instinctively, his hand hovering over the screen as he debated calling her. But then another truth hit him like a wave — she had blocked him. She had shut him long before he had realized.

As the stuffiness in his chest increased, he reached out for his glass that still had the whisky. Swallowing it hard, he tried to stop the ache in his heart but it didn't ease. Instead, a knot of regret started tightening in his chest as he lay back against the couch, staring up at the ceiling.

Will the thing really not get solved if he explains everything? Is there really no turning back? 3

Though he knew the answer already, he still couldn't bring his heart to accept it. *How did he never realize that accepting it would be so tough? Where did he miscalculate?*

Not understanding what he was feeling and why, he could only rely on drinking more to forget whatever was making him uncomfortable. With that, he poured another glass before swallowing it all in one go. His throat felt burning, but that burn was still bearable than what he was feeling in his heart. 7

The next day, 7

Arwen walked out of the wardrobe room when she heard her phone ring at the dresser. Her eyes darted to look over before walking to check. Seeing it was from someone she knew, she picked up the call to answer.

"Hello Carl," she answered before asking, "What is it?"

"Ms. Quinn, something went wrong," the guys spoke, clearly panicking on the other side.

When Arwen heard him like that, her brows tugged in a frown. "It's okay, Carl. Take a deep

breath and then tell me, what's wrong there?"

Silence took over the call and Arwen heard the boy take a deep breath. Once his breathing levelled, he spoke again, "Ms. Quinn, it's about Amelia."

"Amelia?" Arwen's frown deepened. "What happened to her?"

"We don't know where she is exactly. We can't find her anymore. Eira even visited her place but her apartment was locked and the watchman there said that she had left last night and hadn't returned since then," Carl reported.

Arwen paused for a second before asking, "Did something happen to her recently?"

Carl seemed to have paused for a moment and Arwen knew that he had some information there. "That ...Ms. Quinn, recently Amelia has been quite off. She was having some doubts regarding her boyfriends. It seemed like he was cheating on her."

He then hesitated for a fraction of a second before deciding to tell the whole story. "Amelia went to confront her boyfriend last day. Eira went along with her. And it was true. He was cheating on her. They broke up yesterday and

Eira said Amelia's boyfriend humiliated her a little too much. When she left yesterday, she had turned her phone off and since then we have been unable to connect to her." 1

"She must be having a difficult time. Give her some space, Carl, she needs it," Arwen said, before adding, "I will try to check where she has gone, don't worry. Up until she returns, you manage the academy with Eira."

Carl hesitated for a moment before he spoke again, "It's not just about the academy or Amelia, Ms. Quinn. There is something else." He paused before continuing, "Amelia had a performance lined up for her. She had to represent *Giselle* on the stage and this was important."

"A dance performance?" Arwen had no idea about it. "Why have I not been informed anything about it?"

"We thought it would be fine if we handled it on our own. You were very busy recently and Amelia said she would be able to do it on her own. Since she had the experience from the last few times, we agreed. But now, with her gone, we don't do what she should we do?" Carl said, clearly sounding guilty.

Arwen sighed, knowing that if not for this unforeseen situation with Amelia, things would have turned out to be right. She couldn't bring herself to blame them. "What about Eira? I am sure she can also take up the roles to represent *Giselle* now."

"Eira can't do it, Ms. Quinn. She got a hairline fracture last night and the doctor has asked her to take rest or else, the situation of her leg will worsen."

Arwen pinched the space between her brows. No longer having any other choice, she stared up at herself in the mirror before saying, "It's alright, Carl." Her voice came firm yet reassuring. "Don't worry. I will step in and take on the performance myself. Just don't let anyone know about it for now." 2

