



139 She would be free.

Ryan's brows furrowed, and his jaws clenched in frustration every time he typed the name 'Winslow' in the search bar, only to come up with scattered, unrelated information. He couldn't find anything substantial about the man Arwen had married — just the faint trace of an old, not very common surname with no links to someone significant enough to be part of Arwen's world.

His fingers drummed against the table as he scrolled through page after page, his impatience already flaring. Who was this 'Winslow'? What did he do? How did he manage to slip into Arwen's life?

Ryan couldn't fathom that someone unremarkable would catch Arwen's attention. But if he is not unremarkable, then why couldn't he find anything about him?

The Quinn family was highly respected, with envied social and business connections. If Arwen chooses someone, he has to be meaningful.

With a sigh of frustration, Ryan clicked on a phone icon and dialed a number. After a few



rings, the call was answered.

"It's me," he said sharply. "I need you to find out about someone."

There was a small pause on the other end, but soon the person replied. "Sure, Sir. Send me the details and I will soon get you all the information you need."

"Good. I will wait for you to reach me soon," Ryan said before hanging up the call. Once done, he stared at Arwen's profile picture on the screen and gritted his teeth, feeling the bitterness inside. "Arwen, you can't marry someone on a whim. You can't. You better have good reasons for it." 4

In the meanwhile, as Arwen and Aiden headed towards the Quinn Villa, Arwen was oddly silent, and her silence like that made Aiden frown. As far as he knew her, she had never been this nervous about anything.

But recently, whenever her mother would come into the picture, he noticed that Arwen seemed to lose her confidence. Her anxiety around her mother looked more like fear, as though she dreaded confronting the woman. But why? She



had always been fearless. At the age of fifteen, she hadn't even flinched when she had dyed her hair pink just to get on her mother's nerves. So what had changed her so much over the years? Why was she so fearful now?"

His gaze remained steady on her, and it didn't take long for Arwen to feel it too. She glanced at him fleetingly, curling her lips into an awkward smile. "Is my anxiety that obvious?" she asked.

"Are you scared of your mom?" he asked instead of answering her.

Arwen paused for a moment, looking into his eyes as if trying to find the answer within herself. *Was she scared of her mother?* Not exactly. She wasn't afraid of her, but she dreaded the way her mother would make her feel —like she was worth nothing. She feared how her mother would remind her of all the expectations she hadn't met, the accomplishments she hadn't achieved despite the grooming her mother has offered her over years.

"Moon?" Aiden's gentle voice pulled her from her thoughts before she could sink further into the weight of them.

Arwen shook her head, smiling faintly, though it



didn't quite reach her eyes. "No, I am not scared of her. It's just ... I know I ruined everything she had carefully planned for me. She is not scary; it's just that as her daughter, I had a duty to uphold the dreams she built around me." 2

Aiden's hands found hers, his fingers squeezing softly. "But you are not just someone's daughter, Moon. You are your own person. You don't need to carry the weight of anyone's expectations in this world, not even your own."

She believed that too, but somehow, it felt difficult to present it to her mother.

"Expectation limits people and the relationships they share," he continued, his hand still wrapped around hers. "They never give enough space and comfort, and over time, they create a feeling of suffocation." 1

Arwen stared at him. His warmth felt like a steadying presence amid the storm of emotions her mother always stirred up. Under his unwavering gaze, she felt a flicker of her strength return.

He was right. Over time, she had begun to feel suffocated around her mother. There was no comfort, no love, no embrace that a mother

would usually offer her daughter —only a longing that she had constantly tried to fill by tirelessly fulfilling her mother's every wish. Yet never was able to bring her the satisfaction —never was able to get praise.

"You are right," she said softly. "Expectations do limit people. They have limited me for so long ... always making me feel like I am not enough if I don't meet them. But I have learnt my lesson."

Aiden brushed a thumb over her knuckles, his eyes filled with understanding. "It's time to let go of those expectations. To stop carrying the weight."

Arwen nodded and her shoulders relaxed as his words sank in. It felt good to hear someone tell her that it was okay to not fit into the mold her mother had set for her. She had spent so many years tangled in that web, trying to be perfect, to never disappoint. But with Aiden beside her, she could finally see that perfection wasn't the answer —it never was. Maybe it was just stubbornness that her mother passed on to her, and for all these years, she hadn't been able to let go.

But finally today, she would be free.



"Madam, we have arrived at the Quinn Villa. Do you want me to drive in?" Neil asked, and Arwen turned to look outside the car. The gates looked intimidating, but suddenly the anxiety she had been feeling earlier was gone.

"No, it's fine. I will get down here," she replied, turning back to Aiden. Pulling her lips into a soft smile, she reasoned, "You are already late for work. Now, don't delay it more."

Aiden nodded to her, and she smiled before turning to open the door. But just as she was about to push it open, she turned in one swift motion to give a quick peck on Aiden's cheek. Her kiss was full of gratitude. "Thank you," she said, and then without saying more, she stepped out, closing the door after her.

As the window rolled down, she kept her smile and said, "See you later in the evening then."

