

145 Either annul your marriage, or ...

Catrin felt as if someone had drained all her strength from her soul. She staggered, her knees nearly giving away beneath her. Just as she was about to stumble, Idris held her up, steadying her. 1

"Catrin, are you alright?" he asked, his voice laced with concern. 1

And Catrin looked up at him, searching his eyes as if hoping to find some comfort. "Idris, how can I be fine? Did you hear how she is speaking to me? As if I am not her mother but some enemy. How can she talk to me like this?" 6

Idris felt her being wronged and looked up at Arwen, ready to take a stance in her defense. But before he could say a word, Arwen spoke, her gaze distant, as though she were recalling a memory that had nothing to do with the immediate conflict.

"Dad, do you know that whenever I was wronged, Gianna would always ask me why I didn't go and talk to you? Why have I always tried to handle things on my own?" Arwen said, a hint of sadness curling at her lips. "Gianna would complain or ask for anything by going to her

father, and he would always take care of it. Over time, she came to believe all fathers were like that. And even though I knew that's not the reality, I never tried to correct her."

She paused, then shrugged lightly. "I never told her that she was to have that kind of Dad. Because not all dads are the same. Some, like you, are so deeply indebted that, no matter what happens, they can't take a stand and protect their daughter, I let her think I was weak for handling everything alone, but I never burst her bubble by explaining that even if I came to you with my troubles, nothing would change. You won't ever be able to take a stance for me in front of Mom. Nor will you be able to free me from my relationship with Ryan. And you just prove me right all again." 4

Idris felt a deep pang in his chest as Arwen's words sank in. His face went pale, and his arms holding Catrin loosened as he absorbed the weight of her disappointment. He tried to hold her gaze, but Arwen's honesty left him struggling for words.

Arwen never complained, and over time, he began to think himself to be the best father. But only now did he realize how much he had disappointed her daughter. "Arwen..." he began, his voice thick with guilt. He searched for her face, hoping to see a trace of forgiveness or

understanding. "I didn't realize I ..." he started with a murmur but in the end couldn't complete his words.

Catrin turned to him, shocked, not expecting him to waver. "Arwen, how could you hurt your father like this? He has loved you so much. Did you forget it all?"

Arwen turned to her mother and shook her head. "I didn't forget anything, Mom. But over time, I think you both have forgotten that I am not a lifeless doll who couldn't feel anything. I am a human too and I also do feel hurt. You never realized it until today I made you see the mirror."

"Arwen!" Catrin snapped, her voice trembling as she struggled to keep her composure.

"Apologize to us now. You are our daughter and you can't talk to us like this."

"I was just stating how I felt, Mom. How did I say it wrong? Why do you want me to apologize?"

"Arwen —"

"I am sorry, Arwen," Idris spoke finally, his voice laden with remorse. "I thought by keeping peace, I was protecting you. I never realized in turn I have disappointed you to such an extent. I am sorry."

Arwen when heard her father apologizing like

that, she felt bad. But still, she held herself back from stepping up to accept his apology. He might have apologised and she might have felt his sincerity through his words, yet no sorry could make up for what she has suffered over the years. 1

"Idris!" Catrin felt agitated when she heard her husband accepting the defeat so easily. "You have been the best Dad. How can you apologize to her?"

Idris looked into her eyes and shook his head in quiet disapproval. "You can only say whether I have been a good husband or not, Catrin, because that's the role, I played for you. But being the best father —that's for Arwen to decide. She is the one who felt the impact of my choices, of my silence." He sighed, the weight of years of missed understanding pressing down on him. "Maybe I thought I was doing right by her, but I see now that I failed to truly be there. And if she doesn't feel I was the father she needed, then she has every right to tell me so."

He then turned to Arwen, expecting her to say something but when she did, he pressed a weak smile.

But Catrin wasn't as weak and emotional as him. She might have faltered for a moment, but she was quick to gain back her composure.

Straightening her posture, she narrowed her eyes as she focused on her daughter with an intensity that could cut through stone.

"Arwen, your father might have accepted the defeat in front of your insult, but I am not him. I won't let you manipulate me with your words. I asked you to annul your marriage and you will do it — no matter, how many tears you shed or how hard you fight. This is not up for debate."

"I am no longer a kid, Mom. I don't need to beg you for permission to hold on to something I care about. My refusal is all that's needed to shut down your demands. There is no debate here," Arwen replied coolly, picking up her bag before stuffing in her medical reports. Her heart twisting in melancholy. "I came here to have a conversation, which clearly didn't go as I expected. However, I believe I made myself more than clear. Next time, when I come, I will bring my husband for the formal introduction."

With that, she was ready to move, but just as she took a step forward, Catrin's voice, sharp as a blade, rang in the air, "Arwen, don't think you can make us accept him, or accept your outrageous decision."

Arwen turned to stare at her mother, her brows furrowing slightly. Catrin matched her gaze with a cold, unyielding expression and slowly said,

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her voice dropping to a chilling whisper. "I don't agree with this marriage. So here is the thing for you —either annul your marriage, or don't ever call yourself a Quinn. We won't have a disgraceful daughter like you."

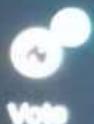
"Catrin!" Iris snapped, the weight of her words sinking in.

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