

152 Where do you think you are going?

Meanwhile, Arwen was finding it hard to cope with her sorrows. She might have held a strong stance in front of her parents before, but the moment she stepped out of that place, the weight of their disappointment sank in, making her feel hollow inside. 1

Her mother's words were like the cruel dagger that pierced her heart with every repetition: *Arwen, blame yourself. You have been incapable. You are a disgrace — a disgraceful daughter. You have been the disappointment.*

Her father's silence tore her apart. Though she didn't expect him to stand against her mother, still she expected something that he failed to provide.

What was she expecting? Her mother to feel her pain for once? That had been a luxury that was hard for her to afford.

She knew a day like this would come and she thought she was ready to survive it. Yet today when everything unfolded in reality, it was harder than she had expected it to be. There was a feeling of numbness in her, yet the pain was a feeling inside was unbearable. Like it held



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no cure.

Arwen walked aimlessly down some street without realizing. Her thoughts were tangled with regret, self-doubt, and desperate longing for solace. The heels of her shoes clicked against the pavement, an empty rhythm that mirrored desolation.

For years, she has lived her life trying to meet everyone's expectations —her parents, society and even Ryan. She had sacrificed her dream and identity, thinking it was what she had to do to find love and approval. And yet, today, here she was, alone and burdened by the wreckage of their shattered hopes on her.

Tears brimmed in her eyes, but she blinked them back. She refused to cry, even though her heart felt as though it was breaking all over again and again. Not because she wanted to pretend to be strong, but because she felt like her tears would prove her to be wrong. And she knew she wasn't wrong.

Taking a deep breath, she shook her head before finally snapping out of the trance that was dissolving her from inside. Her eyes darted around to look and though she had come here aimlessly, it wasn't an unfamiliar place.

"I ended up here again," she murmured before noting the darkness of the dusk that was



engulfing the place around. This might not be her first time coming here, however, it was too late and she knew this area wasn't safe at night. "I need to get back home," she muttered to herself before looking for her phone.

Fidgeting through her bag, she tried to find but she couldn't find it. *Did she leave it somewhere?* Apart from being at Quinn Villa, she hadn't been anywhere else. The possibility of her leaving it there was strong.

Realizing that she might have dropped her phone back there, her hands reached out to pinch between her brows, feeling a burden burdening her again.

Right then unfamiliar voice came from behind, almost making her stiffen in her stance.

"Baby, you look beautiful. Are you lost here?"

Arwen's heart skipped a beat in dread as she turned around to find four men standing there, eyeing her with malice. She instinctively clutched her bag closer to her chest, her pulse quickening. She hadn't forgotten this place was infamous for its outrageous thugs who often hunted in darkness. 2

"Don't be scared, sweetheart," another man jeered with a smirk, revealing his yellow teeth. "If you are lost, we will make sure you get home



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...safe." The rest three chuckled darkly, closing the distance between them.

Arwen took her step back, trying to think of a way to escape. But without her phone, she had no way. Even if she makes a run, she would be getting caught not long after.

"Don't run, baby. We might look scary, but we are not. Be obedient and we will make sure we leave you sated later," another one said, closing the distance further.

"Leave my way. Let me go," she snapped, shoving away one of their hands that was raised to grab her. "I said leave or —"

"Or?" One of the men repeated as if challenging her. "Or you will call the police?" The men laughed. "Baby, there is no use in threatening us with the name of the police. We know that you don't have your phone. And without that, you won't be able to reach them for help."

"Who said I don't have it?" Arwen asked confidently only to hear them chuckle once again.

"You are not thinking of us as naive, right?" They asked. "We have followed you for a good while now to know when that you are not carrying any phone with you, so drop the facade and come to us. We, brothers, won't trouble you too much."



As he said, he tilted his head, his gaze raking over her body in a way that made her skin crawl.

Arwen felt dirty under their such gazes and she tried to sidestep to make a run. But just as she tried, one of the four stepped in front of her blocking her path. When she looked at him, he smiled lasciviously "Come on, don't be like that," he said, his tone mockingly gentle. "A beautiful girl like you should not be out here all alone. It's dangerous."

Her fingers trembled, but she balled them into fists, forcing herself to remain calm. Panic wouldn't help her now. She needed to think, to find a way to get out of this situation before it escalated.

"Stay back," she warned, her voice steady now. "I will scream."

The tallest of the group laughed maniacally, his voice echoing in the air. "Scream all you want. No one is around here to care, apart from us."

Her chest tightened. She scanned the surroundings around, searching for an escape route. But everything around was so eerily deserted that the fear of being stuck here was creeping into her soul, scaring her to the core.

Other than running she had no other way. With that thought, she acted swiftly. Pushing off the



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man who stood in front of her, she bolted, adrenaline surging through her veins.

But she barely made it a few metres before one of the men lunged forward, grabbing her arm with a vice-like grip.

"Where do you think you are going?" he snarled, yanking her back with a brutal force.

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