

The alarm went off.

Her eyes snapped open.

She never was a heavy sleeper anyway. Her circumstances didn't allow her to be. Emma had trained her mind to be alert at all the time. To never ignore even the slightest of noise.

Sitting up she stifled a yawn and quickly made a messy bun out of her long hair while her eyes flickered towards the wall clock.

8:00 AM

She barely slept for two hours straight. Her sleep was always in turmoil. . . as if her heart knew anything could happen anytime. . she couldn't recall the last time she slept in peace.

Her guards were always up.

"At least mom will be home."

Emma got up and went towards the door, unlatching it—her hand stilled for a moment.

It suddenly hit her.

What had her life become into?

What had it turned into? What had she turned into? A squeaky rat waiting for its turn to be pounced on?

And it wasn't the first time she asked herself. .

How long till everything collapses around her?

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Emma peeked in the kitchen.

It was. .empty.

Empty meant. .safe.

Sighing, she stepped in. Her stomach growled impatiently. Waiting to be served.

She turned on the stove and went towards the fridge. Guess she was going to make some pasta. .

Emma bent down slightly, taking in the contents of the fridge. Her heart dipped in disappointment. There was nothing much to play around with. Some veggies and frozen pizza. No pasta. The day she gets her paycheck she was going to buy—

"Like the position you're at."

The second she heard the voice, she snatched back from the fridge—almost hitting her head in the process—her eyes going wild—pupils dilating with sheer terror.

His eyes filled up with unkempt desire, watching her step back in a haphazard manner.

"I love this—," His tongue swiped across his bottom lip. . reminding her of a salivating dog. "This thing in your eyes. The fear. . .it turns me on." His voice sank into a dirty whisper.

"I don't—I don't fear you." Venom laced each word. Hate filled every cell in her body.

A chilling smile spread on his face.

She never feared him but right now she did. Emma clenched her hands into fists. Her heart rate spiking up. . lips chapped up. . she felt trapped!

The escape route was right behind him. And he noticed her harassed eyes shifting from him to the door.

"Looks like your saviour lost his way. . .awwww." His sinister voice turned her insides cold with dread.

Instantly she took a step back.

"Don't you dare!" She raised her index finger in warning.

"Oops! Your hand is shaking." He smirked at her trembling hand.

Emma snatched back her hand as if it caught fire.

"You can't escape me, my little Lolita." He stepped in one long stride. .so close to her. One step and he would be in her face. . He could see the stark fear on her face. .the disbelief of what was about to occur."At least I got you, my beautiful stepdaughter." He closed in and Emma's back hit the marble shelf of the kitchen.

Breathless, she never took off her eyes from the wolf. . Afraid he might strike when she wasn't looking.

He seemed different. His whole demeanour seemed off. .she could smell it on him. .the pungent smell of alcohol mixed with something else. .he had always been good at stomaching his drink. .

And the words broke from her mouth. . .so abruptly. .she surprised herself. .

"Please. . please. . ." She begged silently. Not knowing what exactly was she begging for, Emma felt so foreign in her own body. As if it was happening with someone else and she was watching it happen.

A doe and a crocodile.

He raised his hand and Emma squeezed her eyes shut.

A whimper escaped her mouth when she felt his hand cupping her jaw so gently. Gently.

"Open up. Don't close them on me. .I would be gentle with you. . .I promise. . ." His throaty breath hit her face.

She kept her eyes shut tightly like it would ward him off.

"I said. . open up!" His voice turned hard.

She didn't oblige.

And suddenly his grip on her jaw tightened to the point she felt his fingers digging in her bones. Involuntarily, her hands shot out—ripping at his hand. Trying to scratch away at his skin—her eyes wide open.

"If you disrespected me again I'm gonna fuck your brains out! Right here! Bent you over and—I'll teach you how to obey." His grip crushed at her chin.

And Emma got numbed with the pain. With him in her face—with his body almost brushing against her—his nostrils flaring—his eyes glaring— a dark image flashed across her eyes. A man so confident he could rip the stars from the sky if he wanted to. A man so sure. .she wanted to be him.

Emma felt a rush of resistance like never before. Her blood filled up with courage again. Her eyes flared brightly as the fight in her took position and she bit down on his hand! Hard enough to draw blood!

He yelled, snatching his raw hand back. Soothing the pain away by rubbing it, checking the damage and that was all she needed.

Emma made a run towards the escape route!

"You fucking whore!! " He bellowed from behind. "I'll fuck you—"

His voice faded away when she bounded away, her heart beating madly. Putting distance between them.

Any minute and he would get to her!

Any minute and—

"Get out! Get out! GET OUT!"

She kept shrieking at the top of her lungs, every word that left her mouth gave her an instant boost of energy. She could hear his footsteps following up!

The door was right in front of her!

Emma went straight towards the door and nearly ripped the handle away. .snapping it open she stepped out in the bitter cold. But she didn't stop.

She ran and ran until the pitch black darkness enveloped her.

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Emma had slowed down.

Her bare feet caked in mud. Her jaw had red fingerprints all over. Her face was wet with tears. All she had on was a worn out t shirt and a pair of old pants.

But it wasn't the time to analyze how she looked like. She didn't have the luxury of time.

She had to analyze the situation.

The decision was made the second she stepped out of that place. She was not going back. No way in hell was she ever going back to that house! She had chose her mother's happiness over herself and look where it landed her. .

In deep pile of shit.

It was time she chose herself for herself! She was done sacrificing. .done with hiding from the truth. .done done done!

Her slow walk halted when she realized what could have happened if she stayed there. .

One minute late and he would have gotten his chance. She didn't want to say the heavy word but she had to. .

She was mere inches away from being raped.

Two years back, she would never have thought about such a thing happening to her and now. . .

She almost—

The dark word solidified her resolve of never going back.

Just as she made the decision, her whole being reacted with peace. Funny how looking her worst, she felt at peace.

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"Coming! Matilda, it better not be your disgusting cheese cake— Oh dear!"

The old woman's eyes went wide at seeing the young girl standing on her threshold. Looking like. . .

Like. . .

She couldn't think of a word.

A tulip in the mud?

A beauty blooming in garbage?

"Mrs Bagshot." She smiled and her smile hit the woman's heart. . She had never seen Emma smile so whole heartedly. Her state was so odd. . baggy clothes and bare feet. .yet she radiated beauty. Warmth. .all the good stuff.

"What in the God's name. .come in girl! You might catch cold!" She stepped back. Ushering her in.

Emma stepped in her apartment.

She shut the door and turned around. .nearly hitting the girl with her bony elbow.

The girl was rooted to the spot.

"Do you need a separate invitation for coming in?"

Emma did a strange thing again! She laughed out loud! As if she heard the joke of the century!

"My feet. I need to wash them."

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Mrs Bagshot had fussed all over her. Forcing her to take a bath and change into comfortable clothes. She had gone as far as to blow dry her long hair and then giving up in the middle because of how long Emma's hair was.

She had gone to kitchen to cook up something hot for her.

Emma stood in front of the bathroom mirror, looking down her wet hair. Her cheeks red from the humidity, a small smile on her face. While watching the dirt wash away. .it had felt like his touch too washed away. .his gaze too washed away. .her past washed away. .all the fear. .all the what ifs. .

Hope began to bloom in her chest.

Fighting the darkness away.

If people like Jack existed. .so did Mrs Bagshot.

Her combing hand stilled when the sick moment replayed itself again. Emma knew that moment will be stuck with her all her life. It was that moment that redefine her whole existence.

Everyone had that one moment in their life which flips their world upside down.

She just lived hers.

And got out.

Unscathed.

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Emma could feel her eyes shifting to her now and then but she kept her quiet. Sipping on the hot chocolate.

Mrs Bagshot had occupied the space beside her on the couch. A big cup of coffee in her hand but not once did she taste it.

Emma knew she had questions but how could she answer them? She barely had answers to half the stuff going in her heart. She wasn't ready. .maybe someday she would be. .

"So. . ." She cleared her throat catching her attention at once. " Mind telling me what you were doing out in the middle of the night? Looking like the bride of frankenstein?"

Emma lowered the cup, her eyes downcast.

"I have a question. ."

" Well?"

"What do you do when you want to forget something. . horrible?"

Emma's voice turned low.

"You never utter it. To anyone." Mrs Bagshot was watching her carefully.

Emma glanced at her guarded expressions, her brown eyes vulnerable. .earnest. Asking her to believe her.

"And when do you let it out?"

"After you heal."

Emma nodded, her eyes shining with gratitude.

"Then I'll tell you every single thing that day, Mrs Bagshot. When I heal, you'll be the first one to know about today."

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