

ARDEN

Written by

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EXT. RUNNING TRAIL

ARDEN (21) runs along a trail through the trees. She comes to a

CLEARING

Where her TEAMMATES and COACH wait for her. The coach clicks his stopwatch.

COACH  
Nice job, Arden.

She nods and stoops to catch her breath as REESE (22) comes up to her.

REESE  
You're getting faster. I'll have to step it up or you'll outrun me.

She smiles as she stands, and he puts his hand on her lower back. Her smile fades and she steps away.

COACH  
Alright, everyone, that's it for today. Do a quick cooldown and you can go.

REESE  
(to Arden)  
I'm ready to heat things up. What about you?

Arden looks away and walks to DIANE (21).

ARDEN  
Walk with me?

Diane steals a quick glance at Reese, then nods.

EXT. TREE LINED TRAIL

Diane and Arden walk along the trail.

DIANE  
What's up with Reese?

ARDEN  
God, he's so disgusting. I wish he'd just leave me alone.

Diane nods knowingly as Arden stops and breathes deeply.

ARDEN (CONT'D)  
I wish I could just stay out here.  
Where no one can touch me.

DIANE  
It's nice, isn't it?

ARDEN  
It's the best part about running.

Arden looks up at the trees and inhales again. She takes a step, then limps a bit.

DIANE  
You okay?

Arden shakes out her legs.

ARDEN  
Getting stiff, I guess. My feet  
have been hurting lately.

DIANE  
Maybe you should talk to the team  
doctor. You ready to go back?

ARDEN  
You go ahead.

Diane nods and goes back down the trail. Arden sits at the base of a tree and sighs deeply, staring up at the tree crowns and sunlight filtering through the boughs.

She smiles happily and listens to the trees sway in the wind.

INT. SPORTS CLINIC EXAM ROOM

Arden takes off her shoe for the DOCTOR to examine her foot. It's a brownish-green color and the skin is scaly and flaky.

She flexes her toes and winces.

DOCTOR  
Looks like a nasty case of  
athlete's foot.

ARDEN  
But I'm always super careful.

The Doctor shrugs and washes his hands.

DOCTOR  
I'll give you an anti-fungal and  
it'll clear up in no time.

ARDEN  
What about the stiffness in my  
toes?

The Doctor shrugs again.

DOCTOR  
I'm thinking you might want to  
stretch more. And don't forget to  
stretch after your runs, too.  
(chuckling)  
The mall will still be there.

Arden scowls.

ARDEN  
What stretches?

DOCTOR  
You can look up some tarsal  
stretches online. They're easy and  
don't take long. And just to be  
safe, make sure you don't  
overindulge in fatty foods. Those  
can cause gout if you're not  
careful. Not to mention where it  
ends up.

He pats his belly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
Wouldn't want that, right?

EXT. CLEARING

The team stretches before a run. Arden does a mountain  
climber stretch.

REESE  
Man, I love this view.

Arden sees him staring at her backside. She looks at her  
hands in the dirt, and sees that the skin is a discolored  
greenish color.

She quickly stands and stares at them.

REESE (CONT'D)  
You looking for something to do  
with those hands?

Arden puts her hands behind her back.

ARDEN  
Shut up, Reese.

He laughs and leers at her as she walks to Diane.

ARDEN (CONT'D)  
Want to run together?

Diane spots Reese, then nods.

DIANE  
You should really say something to  
Coach. He'll step in.

ARDEN  
And do what? Pull the fastest  
runner on the team because he gives  
me the creeps? Get real. He'd  
probably kick me off the team for  
being a trouble maker. There goes  
my scholarship.

DIANE  
You shouldn't have to put up with  
that.

ARDEN  
I know. But you know how it is.  
Let's go.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL

Arden pulls up, breathless, and Diane stops behind her.

DIANE  
You okay?

Arden flexes her hands.

ARDEN  
My hands feel so stiff. Can you get  
arthritis in your twenties?

DIANE  
That seems unlikely. Did you talk  
to the doctor?

Arden shakes her head.

ARDEN

He'll just tell me to stretch or something stupid.

DIANE

Maybe, but you can't be too careful. You have to stay healthy this season.

Arden nods, then shakes her legs out again.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Still sore?

ARDEN

It's like my legs are full of lead. I don't get it. It didn't used to be like this.

DIANE

Let's get going. Your muscles are probably starting to cramp.

They run off.

INT. SPORTS CLINIC EXAM ROOM

The Doctor comes in and smiles.

DOCTOR

Can't stay away, eh? What is it now? Mild hypochondria?

He chuckles.

ARDEN

My hands...

She holds them out as the doctor examines them.

DOCTOR

Probably just a reaction to cheap jewelry.

ARDEN

I don't wear anything on my hands.

DOCTOR

No?

He looks again, then shrugs.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Skin like this is usually caused by a reaction to copper. Maybe being outside you came into contact with copper dust.

ARDEN

Copper dust? Where would that come from?

DOCTOR

Oh, any place. Construction zones, auto mechanics, warehouses. Maybe even in the actual dirt. I know you spend a lot of time outside, so it would make sense. Wash them often with soap and water. Clear right up.

ARDEN

Would it make the joints stiff, too?

DOCTOR

No, but that's probably a separate issue. All that studying you do, it's probably carpal tunnel. If it gets worse, we can get you a splint. Just ice it. It'll be fine.

ARDEN

Really? That's it? You don't think the color is related at all?

DOCTOR

You're working yourself up over nothing. It's all in your head. Just minor things that will pass.

He smiles and chucks her on the shoulder.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Now go get 'em, tiger.

She smiles weakly and leaves.

EXT. CLEARING

The team gathers around, warming up. Arden looks around, but doesn't see Diane.

ARDEN  
(to Coach)  
Where's Diane?

COACH  
Said she wasn't feeling well. Sore  
throat or something.

Arden nods and continues to stretch.

REESE  
(to Arden)  
Hey - race ya.

ARDEN  
Whatever, Reese.

REESE  
Winner gets a backrub from the  
loser.

ARDEN  
A real catch twenty-two, isn't it?

REESE  
Not for me.

Arden rolls her eyes and walks away.

COACH  
Alright, let's get going. You know  
the route. Time starts...now.

The runners head out.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL

Arden runs along by herself among the trees. She hears  
something behind her and glances back to see Reese.

REESE  
Was wondering when I'd see you.

He gains on her and she steps to the side of the trail to let  
him pass.

REESE (CONT'D)  
Thanks for slowing down. I would've  
caught you anyway, though.

She motions to the trail to let him go ahead, but he steps  
close to her. She steps back and trips.

He grabs her arm and pulls her up.

ARDEN

Let go.

REESE

You could say thank you.

He pulls her close and she pushes against him.

ARDEN

Let me go.

She pulls away again, and as he lets go, his elbow hits her in the face. Her nose and lip start to bleed.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Dammit!

Reese pulls her close and grabs her face.

REESE

If you'd just calm down, everything would be fine.

He pulls at her shirt, and she struggles against him, getting blood on his hands and shirt. She finally gets free, and falls to the ground as blood drips in the dirt.

She scrambles up and runs, and he gives chase.

She goes off the trail into the woods.

REESE (CONT'D)

You can't outrun me!

She darts through the trees, and falls when her foot gets caught in some rocks.

ARDEN

Not now.

She looks around, then up at the trees that tower over her.

ARDEN (CONT'D)

Help me. I can't...

She kicks off her shoe and lurches forward, then kicks off the other one.

Her foot sinks into the dirt, toes gripping the earth as she staggers through the trees.

REESE (O.S.)  
You'll regret this!

She looks behind her, then moves forward a few more agonizing steps, until she falls to the ground.

She looks up again as she raises her hands up.

ARDEN  
(whispering)  
Help.

She closes her eyes as sunlight overcomes her, turning everything white.

Moments later, Reese bursts through the trees, looking in all directions for her. She is nowhere to be seen.

He looks up at the tall tree in front of him, then goes back the way he came.

EXT. CLEARING

Reese walks into the clearing, where his teammates and Coach stand.

Coach looks at Reese, still covered in blood and smudged in dirt.

COACH  
Where's Arden?

Reese's face falls as he looks around at the accusing faces.