

Her high beams were the only lights guiding Cindy Garland along the Taconic State Parkway. Tree branches hung low over the roadway, and fallen leaves, wet from an earlier rain, made the pavement slick. The clouds hid the moon, plunging her into a darkness so thick it was impossible to see past the first line of elms that flanked both sides of the northbound lane. She was alone on the road, out in the middle of nowhere, the only vehicle in either direction.

Where was he?

Her trembling hands gripped the steering wheel at ten and two. In the glow of her dashboard lights, she could see the blood spatter on her wrists and knuckles. The same knuckles that had knocked on the door. A knock that had been followed by an innocent smile. But then the shouting began. And the crying. And the violence. Nothing had gone like she'd thought it would. Like they'd planned. How could she have been so wrong?

A set of headlights appeared in her rearview mirror, quickly gaining until she had to flip the mirror up to dull the glare. It was him. He'd finally caught up. She stepped on the accelerator and listened as the engine revved, the sudden momentum pushing her back into her seat. The headlights kept pace. She could feel her heart beating in her chest as she rounded a curve in the road and teetered on the brink of losing control.

How fast did he want her to go?

The headlights were only about a car length behind her. She checked the speedometer. Seventy-eight. She couldn't risk going any faster on the twisting mountain roads. Not with the darkness and the slippery leaves and her nerves that still seemed frayed. Why was he going so fast?

Red lights suddenly popped on behind her, and the headlights that had been closing in began flashing strobes. It wasn't him. It was much worse. It was the police.

No.

Cindy pulled off to the shoulder and watched in the rearview mirror as the cruiser stopped inches from her bumper, illuminating the interior of her car with splashes of red and white. There was a moment when she thought about taking off and hoping for the best, but she knew she'd be caught. She didn't know these roads like the cops did, and in her current state, she probably wouldn't get more than a few miles before she ended up in a ditch or wrapped around a tree. She'd just have to play it cool, take ownership of her speeding, and move on. Whatever happened, she'd have to avoid drawing any kind of suspicion. Not with the kind of night she'd had. Not with everything that had gone wrong.

Not with a body in the trunk.

A dark figure exited the cruiser and made his way toward her. Cindy rolled down her window and hid her shaking hands in her lap. The state trooper ducked down and shined a flashlight in her face, then around the interior of the car. He was clean shaven, smooth skin. Couldn't have been more than thirty years old. She could see his name badge on the breast pocket of his uniform.

*Kincaid.*

"Good evening, ma'am," the trooper said.

Don't panic.

"Hello."

"You know why I pulled you over?"

"Speeding?"

The trooper nodded and pulled the flashlight away. "You can't go eighty on these roads. You'll end up hitching a ride in the back of an ambulance. Or worse. Speed limit's forty-five on this stretch for a reason."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"I need to see your license and registration."

Don't panic.

Cindy exhaled slowly. "I can give you my license," she said. "But this is my friend's car. I don't know where the registration is."

"Who does the car belong to?"

"Rebecca Hill. She let me borrow it. I had a date back in Peekskill, and I needed to borrow her car."

"Where are you heading now?"

"Nowhere really. Just driving around. The date didn't go so well."

The trooper turned his flashlight back on and used the beam to point toward the glove compartment. "Check the glove box. I bet the registration's in there. Usually is."

Cindy nodded and unclipped her seat belt. She leaned over to open the glove compartment.

"Ma'am," the trooper said suddenly. "Stop what you're doing."

Cindy froze.

"I'm going to need you to sit back and put your hands on the steering wheel."

"What's the problem?"

"Put your hands on the steering wheel."

The trooper's tone had changed. He was serious now. Anxious. Cindy had done the one thing she'd told herself not to do. For whatever reason, she'd drawn suspicion.

Don't panic.

She slowly placed her hands on the wheel and looked straight ahead.

"Why do you have blood on your hands and pants?"

Tears started to well in Cindy's eyes. The silence stretched between them, raw and unsteady. Nothing had worked like they'd thought it would, and now she was sitting on the side of the road with a cop who was asking about blood on her hands. In a matter of hours, months of meticulous planning had gone to shit.

Don't panic.