

# Freed

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I feel a light touch stroking my cheek... almost as light as wind. I know that touch. Her touch. I barely can open my eyes but I tell her, "You could never wake up before me even some months ago."

She rolled her eyes at me and I couldn't resist smiling. She knows how much I love her face when she does that.

"Wake up mister! Your boss doesn't pay you so you can sleep till late."

"Ugh Odree!" I said while burying my face in the pillow.

"It's Friday, isn't it?" she said, with regret etched on her face, "You know I can't keep up with all the days now, I'm sorry."

I got up and sat in front of her.

"Hey, Don't be sorry. It's good to wake up early anyway, that way I can spend more time with you today."

She smiled at me but it was replaced by a sudden shadow of sorrow when she said, "Raihan, I want to go there today... please."

I understood the sudden change of her expression now.

"But I don't feel like going there."

"You never do and you never will Raihan. But I need you to go there. Please don't refuse me today, it's my last request to you."

I couldn't say no to her when I saw her eyes pleading to me. How could I refuse to fulfill her last wish?

I looked down and nodded. After five years of knowing Odree and one year of our marriage, I still can't look at her eyes for too long.

We got in our car. I put on my seatbelt and was about to ask Odree to do the same but then stopped. I wasn't feeling well in my gut. A strange restlessness occupied my mind. I felt like I was going to lose something... again. If there's only one person who understood my silence, it is her.

"Raihan, do you remember our last long drive? We fought over which songs we should play first and ended up not playing anything at all!"

She started giggling.

"But today we're gonna listen to your songs only. Command me, your highness. Which song would you like to listen to first?"

"Do you need to ask me that?"

"Certainly not." I said while playing one of her favourite songs of all time that she always loves to listen. The sweet melody of John Denver's "Annie's song" serenades both of us in our little car. Odree had told me this story behind it when we started dating. The way she was telling me with a spark in her eyes, I fell more in love with her in that moment. After our first fight, I sang this for her so she wouldn't stay upset with me. I sang very badly but Odree saw my love for her and she melted. She started



ILLUSTRATION: **RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS**

loving this song even more.

I almost forgot that strange feeling I had when I started driving. It came back to me again as I was about to take the last turn before reaching the place where I didn't want to be. Every beat of my heart became

clearer as I could see that very place right in front of my eyes.

"Odree, I can't do this."

"Do you believe in me and that I could never force you to do something that can be bad for you?"

"I believe in you more than I do in myself."

"Then come with me please."

My legs felt too heavy to even move but I got out. The wind wrapped around me as if they were warning me about something. We were at the side of a highway. I stepped forward slowly and then I stopped to see Odree staring at the ground in front of her.

"This is the very place where I was laying."

I felt breathless. My soul was suffocating. I begged her to not say anything more, but she continued.

"I wasn't dead at once; I was fighting with my every breathe. I was trying to stay alive for you, for us! But I couldn't defeat death."

It was getting too hard for me to take. I knelt down beside her.

"You have to forgive yourself Raihan. It wasn't your fault that it happened. Why are you still not forgiving yourself?" she cried.

"If I didn't fight with you that day, you wouldn't have gone out with the car in the first place! There wouldn't be any accident and you would have been alive here with me Odree!" I spoke with all the guilt and anger I had suppressed inside of me.

"No! We both started the fight and I acted impulsively by storming out of the house. I was responsible for it. I'm the reason I'm not here with you! I can't be there for you the way I want to. But I can't see you faking your smile every day and killing yourself inside thinking you are responsible for my death! I can't see you stuck in the past and not allowing yourself to live and do what you love doing. Let go. Stop blaming yourself for something that wasn't in anybody's control. Don't keep hurting yourself like this Raihan. How will my soul find peace if you are not in peace?"

I looked up at her. She was looking into my eyes with great pain.

"Will you take care of yourself the way I've always wanted you to? Will you forgive yourself please?"

I touched the place where she was laying when she took her last breath. I screamed and screamed till my voice hurt. Then I closed my eyes and said, "Odree, I forgive myself."

I looked up and around me, but she was nowhere to be seen. Still I felt her smiling at me from heaven. I felt as if my heart unloaded a heavy weight it had been carrying for four months. A teardrop fell from the corner of my eye and I felt Odree in that drop. She will always be in every part of me.

For everyone reading our story, it may feel like I set her soul free...

but in reality, she set me free.

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