

Should Have Known

By Reaper

Sophia met Erin in the Maxwell University courtyard area during a break between their morning and afternoon classes.

"Hey Erin!" Sophia called out to her friend, beckoning her over to the shade of a willow tree growing by the man-made pond near the courtyard.

"Hi Sophia! How do you think your exam went today?" Erin asked as she set her book bag down next to Sophia and sat next to her on the wooden bench.

"Pretty good, I think I got an A, but it had essay questions so I'll have to wait and see." Sophia said. "Are you going to attend the feminist rally on Friday afternoon?"

"Of course! I wouldn't miss it!" Erin said as though the prospect of missing such an important event were insane.

The two girls had been friends since they had sat next to each other in College English 101 during their freshmen year. Although Sophia was majoring in both teaching and English while Erin was majoring in women studies, their mutual support of feminism had sparked their friendship. Erin had also introduced Sophia to two other students, Michele and Crystal who championed feminism on the campus. Crystal had even been involved in planning the rally that Friday.

"Do you know how long the rally will go on for?" Sophia asked.

"It's supposed to go from five in the afternoon until ten at night." Erin said. "Why? Do you need to leave early or something?"

"No, well, maybe.." Sophia responded. "My car is still in the shop from that little fender bender I had on Quincy avenue. I'm going to need a ride to and from the rally. Do you think you'll be able to take me?"

"Sure, I don't mind." Erin said smiling. "What was the damage anyway?"

"They said it will take sixteen hundred dollars to fix and I probably won't have a car until Tuesday or Wednesday." Sophia said, looking forlorn.

"Well, at least nobody was hurt, right?" Erin said.

"Yeah, as lessons on speeding go I guess I got off easy. Still it's a high price to pay for it." Sophia agreed.

"Did you hear the news this morning? The police found another body last night." Erin said, changing the subject.

"No, I didn't see the news this morning. Did they really? That makes five girls already." Sophia said.

"I know, they still haven't been able to find that homeless man they said was a person of interest." Erin said. "I don't know why they can't just put people like that in jail and just keep them there."

Sophia nodded. The murders had started nearly six months ago. The victims had all been young women and they had all been stabbed to death and their bodies dumped in the wooded areas around town. One of the victims had even gone to Maxwell University. A sophomore named Ericka Gray who had disappeared after leaving a late class and was last seen walking to her car in the university parking lot. She had been found four days later in the woods with multiple stab wounds.

The murder of Ericka Gray had brought about an outcry from the students on campus. There were calls that more lighting needed to be added to the campus parking lot and the security firm working for the college had started hiring additional guards. Banners and posters with Ericka Gray's face on them had been printed with plans to use them at the feminist rally that Friday.

The man the police were currently looking for was a creepy looking homeless person. The press had figured out who he was. A forty two year old man named Norman Pearson who had a history of drug use and had been imprisoned before. More frightening still was that he had served time for attacking and sexually assaulting a woman outside of a night club in another state and he was now a registered sex offender. Since he had been seen in the area where two of the girls had last been seen the police were looking into him as a person of interest.

Unfortunately, it seemed he had gotten word that the police were looking for him and he had gone into hiding. The police were speculating that he might have found a way to skip town or that he might be camping somewhere in the woods around town. Either way since he had gone into hiding there had been no more murders.

"I just hope they catch that guy soon," Sophia said shivering.

"I know what you mean. How are any of us supposed to feel safe with that creep somewhere out there. They think he might be hiding out in the woods even. He could be anywhere just waiting for the chance to find another victim," Erin replied.

"You know, if we had stiffer sentences for people who were convicted for sex crimes this kind of thing wouldn't be happening," Sophia said bitterly. "I plan on bringing that up at the rally. We would all be safe and secure right now if they'd just kept that cretin in jail where he belonged."

Erin laughed. "Why wait until they commit a sex crime? We should just take all men and lock them up."

Sophia laughed too. She knew Erin was joking and even if not, her proposal wasn't very practical. Still, one thing Sophia definitely was an advocate for were safe spaces where women could go where they wouldn't have to worry about men. In fact, Sophia, Erin, Michelle, and Crystal were all advocates on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr that women should have safe spaces.

Quite apart from the constant threat of violence that men perpetrated on women nearly all the time, was the freedom to avoid being sexually objectified. Men it seemed were incapable of interacting with women without objectifying them. Sophia could see it everywhere she went. The way whenever men would talk to her their eyes would inevitably flick to her cleavage. Or how she couldn't even enjoy a Popsicle or hot dog without some creep ogling at her. On those occasions it was fun to look at those men and take a hard bite out of the Popsicle she was eating. She would smile to herself as she watched the creepy ogling guys wince as she did it. Still, the whole thing was so gross. In her mind, there were times when men simply had to go.

"Oh hey, it's Michelle and Crystal. Hey guys!" Sophia called, snapping out of her brooding.

"Hi Sophia! Hi Erin! Are you coming to the rally on Friday," Michelle asked?

"Yeah, we're coming. Do you need help with anything," Sophia asked?

"Nah, I think we're good as far as help goes," Crystal said. "You know one of those muscle head guys who goes to the gym all the time? Yesterday one of them asked if we needed help moving any of the heavy equipment for the rally. Probably hoping I'd somehow fall head over heels for all his muscles and he'd get lucky."

"What a pig," Erin said. "Didn't he know you were gay?"

"I doubt it," Crystal laughed.

"All men are pigs," Michelle said. "I'm not even surprised. But we've got everything under control. I'm going to help with moving some of the heavier items."

"Men need to learn that women can do anything men can do," Sophia said. "Once they somehow figure that out maybe they won't feel like the world revolves around them."

"Yeah, I'm not holding my breath on that one," Michelle said. "They're not really interested in helping us women anyway. When it comes down to it, men only interact with women because they want sex. If they don't get what they want then they either try to take it by force or they just lose interest. We're better off taking care of things ourselves."

Crystal checked her watch and looked up at Michelle.

"We'd better go, our next class starts in about ten minutes," Crystal said.

"Okay, see you later you guys," Michelle called to Erin and Sophia as she and Crystal departed.

"We'd better get going too," Erin said.

"Okay, I'll see you Friday then. Can you come by around four to pick me up," Sophia asked?

"Four works for me, see you then," Erin said as she shouldered her book bag.

* * *

Friday morning dawned with clear blue skies. Sophia only had one morning class on Fridays, and the rest of her afternoon would be free until four when Erin came to pick her up for the feminist rally. The news said tips had come in to the police that people had seen Norman, but by the time police had responded he had

either vanished or the person who reported him being there had been mistaken.

Sophia found herself getting frustrated with her local law enforcement. Her community paid tax dollars for a police force that couldn't even manage to catch one homeless man hiding in the woods around town. The fact that he had been sighted and did indeed seem to be taking cover in the woods nearby made Sophia very nervous. She was glad that Erin was going to pick her up and that she wouldn't be alone at any point. Sophia was thinking that with the exception of the rally, she had no intention of being out after sundown until the police caught the killer in the woods.

Sophia's morning class went by without incident and she was able to get a ride home from a fellow female student. In such an atmosphere, even when Sophia was sure that the killer was the homeless person in the woods, she wasn't prepared to risk allowing some man she didn't know very well to drive her home alone. Trusting men with stuff like that was how women wound up raped or murdered.

By four, Erin still hadn't shown up. But Sophia wasn't that worried. Erin was one of those people who didn't tend to budget time very well and sometimes made plans that conflicted so her being late wasn't that unusual. Sure enough, at about twenty minutes past four, Erin's blue Subaru pulled into Sophia's driveway and she honked her horn.

"Sorry I'm late, I got a late start leaving the house," Erin said.

"It's no problem," Sophia said.

Together they drove to the rally which was being held at the town community center. When they arrived at the rally she was pleased to see that Michelle and Crystal had done a great job setting up for the rally. Sure enough, they hadn't needed any men to help them. Sophia felt that Crystal, who was a computer science major, had been able to help them with the more technical aspects of the setup.

The rally had a full speaker system, a podium and mic, and they had utilized two large flat screen televisions to display the image of the podium speaker so people further away could see clearly. Some of the equipment had been part of the community center, but Sophia could tell some had also been set up specifically for their rally. Banners and posters of Ericka Gray's smiling face were displayed as well along with slogans such as "Ending Male Violence" and "Remember Ericka Gray! Stop Violence Against Women!"

There was a small police presence at the rally too in case any violence did break out, but Sophia was confident that things would be orderly based on the atmosphere at the rally. She spotted Michelle off to the side of the platform and went up to her.

"Wow, you did a great job setting all this up!" she called out to Michelle.

"Thanks," Michelle said. "But you should really complement Crystal. She had a lot more to do with it than I did. I just helped out with moving some of the speakers and audio equipment and hooking things up. Crystal has been directing everyone."

"Do you know where Crystal is," Sophia asked?

"I saw her a few minutes ago but I don't right now," Michelle said as she scanned the gathering crowd with her eyes. "I'm sure you'll see her around."

The rally was starting to become noisy as more people began to show up and talk among themselves. Naturally one of the common themes were the murders and that the police still hadn't found Norman. Among the most alarmist rumors were that Norman would try to show up at the rally and kill one of the women there. Nervous though Sophia was about him, she couldn't see that scenario happening. There would be hundreds of women at the rally and there were police there as well who had been looking for him. She guessed that wherever Norman was, it wasn't anywhere near the rally.

Sophia caught sight of Crystal as the rally began to commence standing off to the side of the podium. It was obvious to Sophia that Crystal had played a major hand in helping to set up the rally. But knowing how uncomfortable public speaking made Crystal, she doubted Crystal would be saying anything at the podium. Sophia made a mental note to compliment Crystal when she got a chance to, which would probably be sometime tomorrow.

Of the people who did speak, Sophia only recognized a few. The town mayor spoke about the town's heritage and about women who made a significant difference followed by the chief of police who assured that everyone's safety at the rally would be the highest priority. Next were several prominent democrat hopefuls

who championed bringing true equality for women. No Republicans were invited to speak, thank goodness. The last thing Sophia wanted was to have some warped social conservative try to convince women that having the government decide what they could and couldn't do with their own bodies was somehow "liberating" to them. What a joke those people always were.

After the politicians provided their, sometimes long-winded speeches, the podium opened up for a few motivational feminist speakers. Sophia found these speakers to be incredibly moving. They spoke of the continued divide between men and women and that strong and independent women were closing that divide, but still there was more to be done and to keep fighting the good fight. They even had a feminist comedian come on for half an hour who had Sophia crying with mirth at the end of her performance. Of the speakers, none of them were famous feminists or anything, but this was just a small town rally. Sophia understood that and thought that they had done a very good job with what they had.

By the time the rally had ended Sophia was in a great mood. She had lost track of Erin during the assembly and found her again by the community centers main doors.

"Hey Erin, are you about ready to go," Sophia asked her.

"Oh no," Erin groaned. "I'm so sorry, I completely forgot I was supposed to take you home. I promised these other girls a ride home too because they couldn't drive and I don't have any more room."

"You've got to be kidding me," Sophia said. "What am I supposed to do now?"

She knew Erin could be absent minded at times but she was not at pleased that Erin had completely forgotten about taking her home.

"Look, I'm really sorry. I'll tell you what, I'll come back and get you to bring you home." Erin said.

"Never mind," said Sophia who wasn't in the mood to wait for an hour for Erin to come back. "I'll just call a cab."

"Okay, I really am sorry." Erin said. Sophia watched angrily as Erin took off to bring the other girls home.

"Hey so what did you think about the rally?" Michelle said coming up behind Sophia.

"Oh hey! It was amazing. You guys did a really good job!" Sophia said affectionately.

"What's wrong?" Michelle asked looking at the expression on Sophia's face.

"It's nothing." Sophia said. "I was supposed to get a ride home with Erin but she apparently forgot and is taking some other girls home. So now I'm stuck trying to get a cab."

"Oh I'm sorry! Tell you what, if you don't mind waiting for a few minutes I can give you a ride home," Michelle said.

"Really? You don't mind," Sophia asked?

"Nope, not at all. Just wait here for a bit while I help move the speakers out and I'll give you a ride." Michelle said.

"Okay." Sophia said.

Twenty minutes later Michelle came and asked if she was ready to go.

"Yeah, I'm ready. Thanks again for giving me a ride."

"Don't worry about it. I'm always happy to help out a fellow woman."

Michelle got in her car and started the engine as Sophia climbed into the passenger side.

"Did you check the backseat before you got in," Sophia asked?

"Yeah," Michelle laughed, "That's been a force of habit for me for years, don't worry."

Michelle drove out of the community center parking lot and turned towards Sophia's home. They drove for a ways talking about the highlights of the rally and laughing at some of the things the various politicians had been saying compared to what they had actually been doing in office. Their conversation ended when Michelle's car began to sputter. With a confused look, Michelle managed to pull off onto the shoulder of the road before her car died entirely.

Michelle tried the ignition on her car. The engine sputtered but refused to turn over. After a minute or so Michelle gave up.

"We're just going to have to get out and try to flag down another car." Michelle said.

Sophia started to become scared. They couldn't have broken down in a worse place. Neither Michelle nor Sophia could get a signal on their cell phone. This was also probably one of the least traveled roads in town

and at this time of night the likelihood of another car passing by was low. When Sophia pointed this out to Michelle, Michelle considered for a moment and then suggested they go and see if they could find someone who would let them use their phone or until they got a signal on their own phones.

The idea of walking along the road by the woods at night didn't please Sophia one bit. She voiced her concerns to Michelle. Michelle nodded and went back to her car.

"Do you have any mace on you?" Michelle asked Sophia.

Sophia reached into her purse and got out a can of pepper spray she had purchased a few months previously after the killings had started.

"Is your mace in date," Michelle asked?

"Yes, it should still be in date."

"Okay," Michelle said. She reached into her car and opened the glove box and pulled out a hunting knife.

"I started carrying this with me after the murders started so I could defend myself if I had to." Michelle explained. "If anyone tries to attack us we'll be ready for them.

Sophia nodded and gripped her can of mace. She and Michelle walked down the road for a few minutes with Michelle leading and Sophia scanning the woods looking and listening for anything that might indicate the sound of the murdering homeless man closing in for the kill. Then Michelle stopped so suddenly that Sophia nearly crashed into her.

"What's up," Sophia whispered nervously to Michelle?

"I think I see someone up ahead near the wood line." Michelle said sounding nervous.

"Are you sure?" Sophia peered into the dark.

"Yes, oh God, I think it might be a man."

"Oh no! Oh no! What do we do," Sophia asked?

Sophia could feel herself beginning to panic. She still couldn't see anything but she thought she heard a crack of a twig and a rustle of leaves. It was the killer coming for them. It was Norman with his creepy stare and dirty clothes and a knife that had claimed the lives of five women.

"Come on, lets go this way," said Michelle, leading Sophia off of the road and into the trees.

"Oh God, it's so dark in there. I'm afraid. What if the killer is hiding in there?"

"If that's the killer behind us he can't be in there," said Michelle. "Besides, any killer won't be able to see in the dark better than we can. The dark can work in our favor to help us hide."

Sophia followed Michelle into a group of dark trees and crouched down beside her breathing hard.

"Do you see him? Is he coming after us?" Sophia asked Michelle.

"I'm not sure...wait...maybe...I think I see something." Michelle whispered. "Hand me that can of mace, if he does find us he's going to regret it."

Sophia took out the can and handed it to Michelle who held it to her side with her finger on the trigger.

"I can't see anyone. Are you sure you saw him?" Sophia asked trying to peer into the darkness.

Michelle didn't respond so Sophia turned to her to ask again. That was when Michelle turned, took her hunting knife, and plunged it to the hilt into Sophia's chest. Sophia gasped. She started to scream but Michelle pulled the knife out and plunged it into her throat. Blood from the wound caused Sophia to cough and sputter. Michelle stabbed Sophia again and again until all movement ceased. Then she cleaned off the blade and walked out of the woods back to her car.

Michelle no longer looked worried, she moved with confidence, as though she had nothing whatsoever to fear. She got back in her car and flicked the kill switch she had used off. With the kill switch disengaged, Michelle was able to start her car easily and drove away.

"As a feminist you really should have known," Michelle said to the empty car, an amused look on her face. "Women can be killers too."