The world spun in a violent blur of white and headlights.

The car slammed sideways into a tree, and her head snapped into the window with a sickening crack.

The phone slipped to the floor, the call ending mid-ring.

Silence.

Snow drifted softly over the crumpled bonnet.

Cold air seeped through the shattered glass.

Tina didn't move. She sat slumped, slipping in and out of consciousness. Shapes smeared together—headlights and snow, and a shadow stepping closer. Footsteps crunched. Then a face appeared in front of her, blurred but familiar.

"Hey," a voice said gently, brushing her hair from her face. "I've got you. I'm getting you out."

Strong arms slid beneath her, lifting her from the wreck. The cold hit her lungs, stealing what little breath she had left. For a moment, her vision cleared—

Tony.

"I need… Dad…" she murmured. Her thoughts scrambled, then snapped into place. "Dad!" Her voice broke through the fog. "Put… put me down. I need to go."

Tony obeyed, setting her down carefully on the snow.

She steadied herself, back turned to him, gripping the side of the car as her legs trembled. A long moment passed—her breath shuddering, her fingers white from the cold.

"I don't need your help," she said, forcing the words out as she climbed back into the ruined driver's seat.

"You could've fooled me, kid," Tony muttered.

“Leave me alone,” she snapped, jamming the key and twisting violently. The engine coughed. Nothing.
“Come on—come on—please—”
She struck the steering wheel with her palm. “Start! You piece of—”

She tried again…

…Then again.

The ignition only clicked, hollow and dead.

Her forehead came to rest against the wheel. Her voice shrank into something small and breaking. “Daddy…” A choked sob escaped her. “Please…”

Tony stood beside the open door, the snow settling on his shoulders. He didn’t move. He didn’t offer comfort. Just watched the girl unravel, the desperation burning through her like a fever.

Silence filled the space between them—cold, heavy and suffocating.

After a few long seconds, Tina’s trembling hand reached for the key again. She tried. And failed. Then tried once more…

…once more.

…just once more.

the effort dissolving into a hopeless shake of her head.

Finally, her eyes lifted—red, wet and furious—toward Tony.

“You done?” Tony asked.

She shook her head. “Fuck you.”

She scrambled awkwardly across the seat, found her phone wedged under the pedals, and tried her dad’s number again.

No signal and no connection. Nothing.

So she shoved the door open, stepped into the snow, and started walking—unsteady but determined.

“We need to go back,” Tony called.

She stopped and turned. The silence around them was dense, pressing and unnatural. Snow settled in her hair. Her hands were red from the cold.

“I’m not going back with you,” she said.

Tony stood with his hands deep in the pockets of his leather jacket. “Tough break.”

Her face twisted. “What are you talking about?”

“Your mum.”

She shook her head. “Whatever, dude.” She turned away and kept walking, boots crunching hard on the frozen ground.

“This isn’t the way,” Tony said, stepping after her, slower, careful. “We can help you. But you need to come back. The city’s too dangerous right now. Order has been lost. It’s chaos.”

But still, she continued forward.

He followed at a steady pace. “Where you go, I go.”

“Just leave me alone,” she said through clenched teeth.

“Where you go, I go. You’re putting us both in danger, kid.”

She spun around, fury shaking her voice. “You’re just such a—”

“Such a what?” he shot back, closing the distance. He leaned in, eye to eye. “Such a what?”

She looked away. “Who cares.”

Her phone lit up.

Dad.

She answered instantly, pacing in a tight circle. “Daddy,” she cried, running a hand through her hair. “I’m so sorry—where are you? Where are you?”

Static crackled. A faint voice bled through.

“Tina… I’m— I’m just on the road— toward the city… get there in a couple of hours, it’s… traffic… when I get—”

“Dad, turn back. Do not go into the city. Just—just tell me where you are. Dad? Where are you?”

The line crackled.

Then: Signal lost.

Call ended.

She screamed, hurling her phone into the snow.
The night swallowed the sound.

After a moment, she trudged forward, retrieving the phone with shaking hands.

“So let me get this straight,” Tony said behind her. “You’re marching into the city to find your dad, even though you don’t know where he is… and can’t call to find out.”

“I’ll find him,” she muttered, already moving. “He needs my help.”

Tony nodded. “I admire your courage, kid, but you won’t last long.”

“Fuck you,” she said, under her breath.

“Think about it. Walking a few miles down that way. In this cold? It’ll kill you before you even see the edge of the city. Or something else will.”

She kept walking.

“Hey—kid.”

She stopped. Turned. Her face blotched red with cold and tears. “Go on,” she said, her voice small and shaking. “Say it. Say something to make my night even worse. You’ve already made it pretty clear that you fucking hate me.”

Tony blinked—surprised by the hit. “I don’t hate you, kid,” he said. “Tina… I don’t hate you. I hate this. I hate the situation we’re in. But you?” He shook his head. “No.”

She didn’t respond.

“You can’t do this alone,” he continued, stepping closer but keeping his voice gentle. “You want to save your dad? Then come back with me. We’ll go together. We’ll gear up. We’ll head into the city with you. **Together.**”

She looked down at her phone, trying again—no signal. Nothing but a dead screen and a trembling hand.

Tony moved slowly, stopping a few steps away. “Listen. It’ll take you hours to reach the city on foot in this storm. Or you can come back with me. We prep, we move. We stand a chance. But not like this. Not alone.”

Finally, she lowered the phone.

He was right. And she hated that.

“Please. We have to hurry,” she whispered.

Tony nodded once. “Then let’s not waste time. C’mon.”