**“Den”**

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The story revolves around the life of a teenager living in the suburbs; Ruben who was forced to grow up being exploited and trafficked for cybersex and child prostitution to make ends meet. His life takes a turn as he faces new feelings of intimacy he has never felt before.

The story opens with Ruben, 15, doing his daily routines as a teenage sex worker along with other boys of his age as they cater to older men, often foreigners. One day, his mother Lena, early 40’s, introduces Greg, early 30’s as her new boyfriend. Lena ang Greg got together through drinking, smoking, and doing drugs. As Greg’s stay on the house get longer, he would then take sexual advantages of Ruben and would threaten and physically abuse him if he won’t abide.

One day, Greg introduces Simon, 15. A newcomer to the town and is interested to apply as a sex worker. Lena then orders Ruben to show Simon around the job. As days pass on, the two grew an exceptional bond between them making Ruben question himself as he develops romantic fondness for Simon. The two became more intimate and open to each other emotionally and sexually until things changed when Lena was reminded of Ruben’s long-time request for her to allow him to continue his studies. Lena tells Ruben of this as she plans to expand her cybersex den once Ruben finishes high school and gets a job.

Ruben then goes to school and meets a girl of his age named Clara, 16, an outcast. The two became friends instantly and would go inseparable often meeting at a river for a swim causing Ruben’s absence on the den.

Days pass on, Simon notices the frequent absence of Ruben and confronts him about it. Ruben now torn between telling Simon what’s actually happening and avoiding hurting his feelings, doesn’t know how to answer and just shrugs the question off. Simon then opens up about the real reason why he chose to work on the den which is because of his ailing mother and six other siblings whom he calls to using an old, overused cellphone. Simon shared how they were left by his father. After hearing Simon’s struggles, Ruben finds it more difficult to tell Simon about the growing relationship he and Clara have. Ruben chooses to stay closer to Simon to keep him comforted through the time.

At school, Clara felt the distant aura Ruben is projecting onto her. She asks him about this and Ruben just brushes off the question and walks away. After feeling guilty of what he has done to Clara, Ruben decides to open up to Simon about his developing feelings for Clara fearing that it isn’t right because he has only experienced intimacy with the same sex and doesn’t know how to show affection for a girl plus who it could possibly hurt him and their relationship. Simon then opens up about how he, personally can be attracted to both genders. Ruben came to terms on how he can like both Simon and Clara then ended up introducing the two to each to other.

At the river, Simon and Clara were introduced to each other by Ruben. The two instantly formed a certain connection. Ruben, seeing this, doesn’t seem to mind but rather seem to involve himself as a third of the relationship.

Since then, the three would then often meet at a river for a swim. Simon and Ruben confess to Clara about their life as sex workers. Clara, now feeling more comfortable and seeing Simon and Ruben for their struggles, shares an experience which led her to be outcasted. At the age of 13, she was raped by a cousin who got her impregnated. She shares how this became an instant topic among gossips and labeled her as a whore. She never opened up about it, even to her family. Which caused for her father to take sexual advantages of her seeing her as someone experienced, the reason why she chooses to stay outside and hang out with them rather than going home. The three, now being more open and vulnerable with each other, then grow closer and closer to each other until they happen to form a certain romantic bond promising each other that they’ll look after one another and while also saying how good it feels to open themselves up sexually and emotionally in a way that they are not being forced to do so.

One day at the river, Clara and Ruben got to talk about their dreams and how tired they are with the lives that they are living and would do anything to escape. Simon on the other hand, refuses the idea saying that he has nowhere to go and he has to support his family back home. The two convinced Simon that they’ll help him start anew but Simon remained silent.

Days pass on, Ruben reminds Simon of their plan to escape as they were on their way home from a customer they serviced. Simon seems to not listen to Ruben as he remains silent and pre-occupied. Ruben asks what’s wrong and Simon reveals that he got a call from home saying that their mother has died. Ruben then stops convincing Simon and decides to give him all the money he earned from the customer. The two continued walking home.

When they got home, Lena immediately asks for the money and got angered by how small the amount is. Simon tries to cover up for Ruben saying that the customer was really stingy. This sparks up an argument between Ruben and Lena. Lena calling out Ruben and Simon for their frequent absence on the den while Ruben confronts his mother that he does not even wanted this life and how she has born and forced him into this. Lena and Greg then argue that Ruben and Simon probably wanted this because they are gays and enjoy the company of men. This sparks up an attempt from Ruben to pack his bag and leave the house, but Greg stops him pointing a gun into his head.

Simon and Ruben, now threatened, were then forced into doing their original routines, performing live shows for old foreigner men on a video call. Ruben, while crying in front of the computer is seen by Simon who takes out his phone from his pocket. Dialed a number. A few moments after, police came and busted into the house arresting Lena and Greg.

Ruben’s face while crying is shown as the red and blue lights reflect on his face. Simon then grabs him by the sleeves. The two ran away meeting Clara along the way. The trio kept running and running to escape authorities that might take them to foster houses. At last, they are freed from the lives they had and are ready to start anew.