

## Finding comfort

(Olivia)

It's been two days since I had spoken to Derek, and I was excited that he was coming back today.

At least I will be able to spend some time with him and take my mind off certain things.

Work had become more stressful than I expected. My hours of freedom were gone, and I had to be on my toes all the time.

I noticed the change in my boss. She wasn't as kind and loving as she was towards me before.

It made me wonder what was going on. I didn't have time to think about that since the doorbell went off.

I hurriedly made my way towards it and squealed since I knew that it was Derek. I didn't even realize that I had gotten to this point where I became dependent on him.

I don't hate it, though because I enjoyed his company.

"Hey, beautiful," he said, pulling me into a hug. I inhaled the familiar scent of his cologne, feeling a lot better now.

"Hey, you," I replied, pulling back to look up at him.

"How was work?" I asked while smiling at him.

"Exhausting. But I'm just glad to be back," he said, a hint of a smile creeping onto his lips.

"Ready for dinner?" I was eager to spend some time with him.

"Absolutely. Where are we going?" He grinned, his eyes never leaving mine.

"I thought we could go to a diner. You know, the one with the best burgers in town that you told me about?" I couldn't help but laugh.

"You know me so well. That sounds perfect." We drove in comfortable silence, which was exactly what I needed.

As we arrived at the diner, I felt a rush of excitement; this place held so many memories, each one sweeter than the last.

Once inside, we settled into a booth, the kind with red seats that squeaked when you moved.

I glanced around, looking at the familiar atmosphere. The laughter of families, the clattering of dishes, and the smell of fries in the kitchen.

"What's your go-to order here?" Derek asked, peering at the menu.

"Burgers and fries, always. You can't go wrong with the classics." I smiled, realizing how much I appreciated this moment of simplicity.

"What about you?" I asked, wanting to know more about him.

"Same. You can't beat a good burger." He looked up from the menu, his expression curious.

"So, what's your favorite memory from here?" I chuckled, thinking back to all the times I'd come here with my high school friends and late-night talks over greasy food.

"There was one time I came with a couple of my friends back then. We stayed for hours, talking about life, relationships, and everything in between. We ended up challenging each other to see who could eat the most fries." Derek laughed.

"How did that go?" Seems like he was interested in my story, so I continued to talk.

"I lost," I admitted while grinning.

"But it was so much fun, just being young and carefree." Those were the days.

"That sounds wonderful," he said, his gaze steady.

"What do you miss most about those days?" I paused, considering his question.

"Honestly, just the feeling of not having to worry about anything. I was so naive back then but in a good way. It was like I had this bubble around me, and nothing could touch it." Derek nodded his head, understanding what I meant.

"I get that. Sometimes, I miss the days before all the pressure of work and responsibility. But I guess that's part of growing up, right?" He replied.

"Yeah, but it doesn't have to be all bad," I said, loving the connection that we were building so far.

"It's nice to have someone to share it all with now. Someone who sees me." His smile widened when I said that.

"I'm glad you feel that way. You deserve to be seen, Olivia. You've come so far, and I'm proud of you." Just then, the waitress arrived, interrupting our moment.

"What can I get you two?" she asked, her notepad ready.

"I'll have the classic cheeseburger with fries and a Coke," I said, glancing at Derek.

"Same for me, please," he added, ashing the waitress a charming smile.

As she walked away, I turned back to Derek.

"So, what about you? What's a favorite memory from your childhood?" He leaned back, contemplating.

"I think it would have to be family barbecues. My dad would re up the grill, and we'd spend the day outside, playing games, eating far too much food, and just being together. It was chaotic but in the best way." He had this faraway look on his face as he spoke.

"That sounds wonderful," I said, picturing it.

"I can't imagine what it was like for you to grow up in a big family."

"It was a lot, but it taught me the value of connection," he replied.

"What about friends now? You never mentioned any of them." I looked down, wondering if he would nd me boring if I told him that part. But, I didn't care. If he doesn't like the way I am now, then he can just leave.

"My views changed. College happened, and I became more focused on my education. Right now, I would rather just be by myself you know? I hate people, they make my skin crawl." What I said made him laugh.

"I don't blame you for feeling that way. My only friend since I was younger until now is Jake. Having more than one friend can be stressful enough." I breathed a sigh of relief, thanking God that he didn't have a problem with what I said.

Shortly after, our food arrived, and we started to eat while asking each other questions from time to time.

I was enjoying myself more than I gave credit for.

I took a glance around and furrowed my brows. I thought that I saw Aaron, but the more I looked at the person, trying to gure out if it was him, the more I started to believe that I might be wrong.

So, I dismissed it as nothing and continued to have a good time with Derek; that's my focus right now.