

Chapter 78

FLASHBACK

High school was a time of heightened emotions for Riley. The absence of a father figure in her life became a gaping void only magnified by the sight of her friends with their dads. Yet, Renee, her mother, steadfastly refused to broach the subject of Riley's father for reasons unknown.

As the school day came to an end, Riley's footsteps echoed through the empty hallways. She hurried home, her heart heavy with unspoken questions. The familiar scent of her mother's cooking greeted her as she entered the kitchen.

"Good afternoon, Riley. How was your new school?" Renee asked.

Yes, a new school. This was a result of their nomadic lifestyle in the past years, constantly moving from one city to another. But now, her mother had secured a stable job in Halliport, and Renee believed it was time to settle down.

"School was great, Mom," Riley said. "I met new friends."

"Wonderful. Let's have dinner now because, as you know, work starts early for your mom," Renee said while setting up the plates at the nook table.

Riley put her backpack down and helped prepare the food. It wasn't until they were done with their meal that Riley finally found the courage to say, "Mom, I'm already in high school. Maybe it's about time we talk about my dad. Maybe things have changed? And maybe he wants to meet me?"

Renee froze in her seat. She breathed deeply and answered, "It's not a

good idea. Forget about your father."

"But, mom?" Riley objected.

"Am I not enough, Riley? Is my love not enough?" Renee raised.

Suddenly, tears flooded her cheeks. 

"It's not that, Mom! I just want to know who my father is -"

"Then, what if I tell you that knowing your father would risk our lives!"

Renee snapped. "You have no idea what I have been through because of your father's family!"

"When his family found out I was pregnant, they wanted me to abort you! When I refused, they found a way to kick me out of my apartment!" Renee added.

"They are not easy people to deal with, and your father? He left the country! He couldn't do anything! He abandoned us, Riley! He abandoned us!" Renee reported. "He left us when I was in despair, running away from his family, and went into hiding! I was still pregnant back then, Riley! Pregnant! I almost died, and I almost lost you!"

"I almost died!" Renee repeated loudly. "We both almost died!"

Renee gave Riley her back and broke down completely before the kitchen sink. She said, "Do you think I want to keep you from your father? How about I just want us alive?!"

Watching her mother become an emotional wreck took Riley aback.

Renee was only evasive in the past, so this news came as an exploding bomb to her.

"My father's family tried to have me aborted? They tried to kill my mom?"

She mused. Her skin crawled as tears trickled down her face.

"I never had a choice, Riley," Renee spoke again.

Riley's heart was congested, and she did not know how long she would remain still. When her senses returned, she approached Renee and hugged her mother from behind. She said, "I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry."

Renee turned to hug Riley back. The mother and daughter continued to weep until their emotions settled. After that, Renee suggested, "There is so much more that I want to tell you, but I can't. You have to trust me on this." 1

"Knowing your father will risk our peaceful life," Renee said. "So, forgive me. I will never tell you who your father is because you'll get curious. You'll want to meet him. If you meet him, it will stir up his family. The conflict in your father's family is too much, too much that it could kill."

"Besides, if your father wanted to find you, he would have by now, but he did not. It's been many years, and he knew I was pregnant when he left me to be with his family. We are better off away from them," Renee concluded. "Do you understand, Riley?"

Riley nodded while remaining to hold her mother. She answered, "Yes, Mom."

"Do not speak to anyone about this, Riley. If you do, other people will become curious about your father. If anyone asks, just tell them that you don't know your father and he abandoned us," Renee said.

"Yes, Mom," Riley agreed.

END OF FLASHBACK

Back to the present.

Since that incident, Riley has never forced her mother to share anything about her dad. Sometimes, they talk about it lightly, but Renee was careful with the information she conveyed to Riley.

All Riley understood was that her father's family was dangerous. Whether they belonged to the mafia, were in an illegal business, or had so much greed, she was determined not to know.

So when Adrian suggested that he knew her father, Riley's heart raced. She asked, "Did you look into it? I told you not to!"

"It was an accident, Riley. I stumbled into it. So, I had to check. Still, I'm not sure," Adrian reported.

"What do you mean you are not sure?" Riley asked.

"I still need to confirm a few details, and of course, we must do a DNA test, right?" Adrian suggested.

'A DNA test?' Riley mused. 'Would the father who had forsaken me want to do this test? What about my father's family who wanted to abort me?'

"No!" Riley replied.

"Adrian, please," Riley held Adrian's arms. She begged, "Please let it go. I don't want to know my father. He abandoned us. His family did not want us. If he wanted to know me, he would have searched for me. I am already twenty-seven, Adrian."

"But -"

"No," Riley firmly said. She feared that Adrian's meddling would alert

her father's family, whoever they were. Riley was already happily married and had a bright future ahead. Why would she disturb her peace for a father who left her and Renee? So, she insisted, "No, let's leave it." 

"But, Riley –" Adrian tried to reason with her.

"Look, Adrian, my mom told me that my father's family wanted to abort me back then. Why would I want a family like that?" Cupping Adrian's face, she repeated, "Promise me not to look into it again. I don't want to know who my father is. All I need is you and my mom."

"Please, Adrian. Please," Riley appealed. She saw the reluctance in Adrian's eyes, but eventually, her husband gave in.

Adrian embraced her and said, "Okay. If that is what you wish. I will let it go."



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