

Chapter 23

[Vivienne]

I rush into his arms, feeling the tension melt away as he holds me tightly. "I missed you, Harvey."

"I missed you too, kiddo," he replies, giving me a reassuring squeeze before stepping back to look at me. "Are you okay? That must have been pretty stressful. I'm so sorry that you have to go through that."

"I'm fine now," I smile up at him, feeling truly blessed to have a big brother like him. "But what are you doing here? I thought you were busy. At least, that's what the receptionist said."

"I was, but I had to cut my meeting short when I heard about the situation," he explains, his expression growing serious. "I couldn't let this go unchecked."

"Thank you for stepping in. I don't know what I would have done without you."

"Anything for you," he says with a warm smile, handsome as ever. "Now, let's get you out of here and go grab some coffee. We need to catch up."

We leave for his office and all this while Harvey keeps a protective arm around me, probably letting everyone know that I'm someone of importance. That's Harvey Richardson for you, the man who likes to make statements not through words but actions. I can't help but feel a sense of relief knowing he's here.

We settle into his cozy office, and as soon as we're seated, he looks at me intently. "So, tell me everything. How have you been? How's your life?"

I shrug. "There's not much to tell, really."

He sighs. "Come on, kiddo, we haven't seen each other in a long time. Let's talk."

"Okay. Fine. Where should we begin?" I take a moment to think before speaking, "I'm not doing great at the moment."

His eyes darken at that. "Did someone hurt you?" he leans forward. "Is it Caden? He better not have done something stupid."

Now, how am I supposed to tell my brother how my life with Caden has been? One thing I know for sure, however, is that I can't lie to him. He's family, and he deserves to know everything. "I'm divorcing Caden."

He's quiet for a few seconds, then finally says, "I'll kill that motherfucker. He did something stupid, didn't he? He hurt you. He was supposed to protect you but instead he hurt you. Dad and I always knew there was something off about him. Sure, he's a good businessman but his family? They have always been a mess. Always some kind of drama in there, you know."

He runs a hand through his hair as if he's just remembered something else and looks at me, his brows furrowed. "Does that mean you're coming back home now? Because that's the only good thing coming out of all this. I'll have my sister back. God, we've

missed you."

I smile, my heart finally at peace. This is what I have been missing in my life ever since I married Caden. "Actually, I returned last night and was planning to surprise you today."

A flicker of surprise crosses his face. "Last night? I would have loved to have known in advance that you were coming so we could have held a celebration to welcome you back."

I shake my head, still smiling. "There's no need for that. And dad wanted to give you a heads-up this morning, but I asked him not to. I wanted to see that reaction on your face when I tell you in person."

He arches his brow at that. "Are you saying you planned to sneak in here to see me?"

I give him a cheeky grin. "Like the old times."

"That you did," he laughs, a soft expression crossing his handsome face. "It feels great to have you back."

I bite my bottom lip. "Well, there's more."

He puts his hand on mine and looks deep into my eyes. "Tell me everything. I'm all ears."

"Well," I pause and take a deep breath. "I might have returned home, but I don't plan to stay long."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean exactly that," I explain. "You see, I have got this apartment in

town. It's beautiful. So I'll stay there and work on myself. I have so much to do, Harvey. So much to achieve."

He pulls his hand away and crosses his arms, a frown marring his forehead. "I don't understand. Why not stay with us? It's home, Viv. And everyone has really missed you. Mom especially."

"I know. I miss her too. But you have to understand. The last three years have not been kind to me, and now that I have the freedom to be myself once again, I don't want to waste it by returning to the same place where I had all that. I want to work, work hard for my future. I want to be independent. I want to earn my living, not let someone take care of me."

He stays quiet, the silence between us stretching out so long that it becomes deafening. Just as I'm about to ask if he heard what I said, he stands up.

"Looks like you have already made up your mind about this," he says, looking down at me and leaning back against the table. "So there's no use in arguing about it."

"Thank you for understanding."

"I don't understand," he gives a rueful shake of his head. "I just know when I've already lost. You were never the easy one to convince, even as a child. If your mind was made up then, you wouldn't budge."

"I just have this feeling that I need to do this." I can't really put this feeling into words but it's so powerful. "I know it's weird, but that's the way it is."

"Not weird." He looks down at me and gives me a warm smile. "Just not very practical. You know I don't agree with any of this. But what can I do? You have your heart set on doing things your own way. You always did."

I shake my head and give him a small smile. "No need to worry about me. I'm not going to make the same mistakes again, and if you think that I'm just running away again, you are wrong. This is about taking on responsibilities."

"Fine," he relents with a sigh, though there's a worried look in his eyes. "Then tell me, how do you plan to be on your own? Have you thought of something already?"

"Actually, I do have something in mind," I say to him and he perks up with immediate interest. "Have you heard of Jasper Sterling?"

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