

No Second Baby, No You, Only Divorce

Chapter 20

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He put a hand on Scarlett's shoulder, his voice gentle. "I'm so sorry. I had no idea."

Scarlett shook her head. "It's not your fault. It's mine. I should've been a better mom. A better

wife."

Nolan pulled her into a hug, careful not to overstep. "No. You did your best. Sometimes, that's not enough—but it doesn't make you a failure."

Scarlett pulled away, wiping her tears. "And Vincent-he's my husband. Well, soon-to-be ex- husband."

Nolan nodded, his heart aching for her. He now understood why she'd been so quiet at the restaurant, why she'd ignored Vanessa-she was hurt, not cold. "I'm sorry I didn't realize sooner," he said.

Scarlett smiled, a small, shaky thing. "It's okay. None of it matters anymore. I'm letting go." She'd tried to save her marriage, to win back her daughter's love, but it was no use. Vincent and Vanessa had chosen Sabrina, and Scarlett had chosen herself.

After Vanessa darted onto the stage, Vincent didn't rush to follow. Instead, he glanced to the side-and his gaze landed squarely on Nolan dabbing at Scarlett's tears.

They stood so close, from his sight, it looked like they might as well have been pressed together.

Just then, Sabrina appeared, having changed out of her performance dress. She was guiding Vanessa back toward Vincent, her steps soft.

“Vincent,” she called, her voice warm and gentle, like she was afraid to break the moment.

Vincent snapped out of his staring, his attention shifting to Sabrina. A faint, soft smile tugged at his lips. “Hmm?”

“Want to get dinner together?” Sabrina suggested, her tone light, like it was just a casual thought rather than a plan.

Vincent’s smile widened as he nodded. “Sure. That sounds good.”

Vanessa immediately tugged at his arm, her eyes lighting up. “Dad! I want barbecue! Please?”

Sabrina reached over, tapping Vanessa’s little nose playfully, a laugh in her voice. “You little foodie-always thinking about eating first.”

Outside the music hall, the cold night air helped clear Scarlett's head. Nolan suggested grabbing

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something to eat, and Scarlett agreed-she was hungry, and she didn't want to go home to an empty house yet.

They walked to a nearby barbecue restaurant, a casual spot with the smell of chili in the air. Nolan held the door open for Scarlett, and she stepped inside-then froze.

In the center of the room, at a large table, sat Vincent, Vanessa, Sabrina, and a few others. Vincent and Vanessa had their backs to the door, but Sabrina was facing sideways-she hadn't seen them yet.

Scarlett recognized two of the men at the table-Daniel Lennox and Harris Whitmore, Vincent's business partners. The woman with them was a stranger, but Scarlett wasn't surprised -Vincent's circle was full of people who brought different dates to every event. The only constant was Sabrina.

Nolan saw them too. He grabbed Scarlett's arm, his voice urgent. "Let's go somewhere else. We don't have to be here."

But Scarlett shook her head. She stood up straight, her chin high. "No. I didn't do anything wrong. I'm not hiding." She'd spent too many years hiding-hiding her feelings, hiding her disappointment, hiding from the fact that her marriage was falling apart. Now, she was done.

Nolan looked at her, admiration in his eyes. He smiled. "Alright. Let's eat here."

They chose a table near the door, far from Vincent's group-back-to-back, so neither could see the other. Nolan handed her the menu, and Scarlett ordered two dishes she loved-spicy fish and grilled greens.

The food came quickly. Scarlett took a bite of fish, savoring the heat, when Vanessa's voice cut through the noise.

"Daniel! Sabrina's the best! Her piano playing is like magic-you have to hear her sometime!" Vanessa gushed.

Daniel laughed. He leaned forward, grinning at Vanessa. "Oh, I've heard. Sabrina's a genius- grad school, PhD program, piano prodigy, even models on the side. She could do anything she wants and be the best at it. You're right to look up to her."

Vanessa preened, her chest puffing out. "I know! She's the coolest person ever!"

Scarlett's fork froze halfway to her mouth. Her daughter thought Sabrina was "cool"-the woman who'd taken her father's love, who'd made Vanessa hate her. What had Scarlett ever done to make Vanessa feel that way? She'd fed her, bathed her, read her bedtime stories, stayed

with her when she was sick. But none of that mattered.

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Nolan noticed her hands shaking. He put his hand over hers, squeezing gently. “Ignore them. Eat your food.”

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Scarlett nodded, taking a deep breath. She picked up her fork again, forcing herself to eat. She wasn’t going to let them ruin her night—not anymore.

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