

No Second Baby, No You, Only Divorce

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Over at Theron Manor, the air was thick with tension. Scarlett hadn't been home in six months, and it showed-Henry and Diana sat quietly, Nathan glared at his plate, and Violet kept shooting worried glances at everyone.

The dinner table was piled high with Scarlett's favorite foods-creamy garlic pasta, smoked salmon, even her mom's famous chocolate chip cookies for dessert. But no one was eating

much.

Scarlett had fought tooth and nail to marry Vincent. She'd threatened to cut ties with her family when they'd objected, told them they "didn't understand true love". But after the wedding, Vincent had never once stepped foot in Theron Manor. He'd never met her dad, never hugged her mom, never even sent a birthday card.

Nathan set down his fork with a clatter. His voice was sharp, laced with sarcasm. "Tomorrow's Richard's birthday, right? Shouldn't you be at the Stewart Manor, slaving over a stove for them? What, did they finally let you take a night off?"

Scarlett didn't flinch. She'd expected this-Nathan had never hidden his hatred for Vincent. She smiled, calm. "From now on, I only celebrate Dad's birthday. Richard can fend for himself."

Nathan froze. He stared at her, like he was trying to figure out if she was joking. “What are you up to? Another one of your ‘I’m gonna fix my marriage’ stunts?”

Scarlett shook her head. “I’m getting a divorce.”

The room went silent. Diana’s eyes filled with tears. Violet’s mouth dropped open. Henry, who’d barely said a word all night, finally looked up.

Violet was the first to speak, her voice gentle. “What about Vanessa? Are you fighting for custody?”

Scarlett let out a bitter laugh. “Vanessa doesn’t want to stay with me. I’m giving it up.”

It killed her to say it. Vanessa was her baby-her first, her only. But she’d seen the way Vanessa looked at Sabrina, the way she’d called Scarlett a “bad mom”, the way she’d pushed Scarlett’s kisses away. She couldn’t force a child to love her.

Violet squeezed her hand. She was a mom too-she knew how much this hurt. “Divorce is the right choice, Scarlett. You deserve someone who treats you like a person, not a maid or a baby

machine.”

Scarlett nodded. “I’m not looking for anyone new. I just... want to be me again.”

She was tired of being “Mrs. Stewart”. Tired of cooking, cleaning, waiting. Tired of loving

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someone who didn’t love her back.

Violet piled more salmon onto Scarlett’s plate. “This house is always your home. You’re still our princess-don’t you forget that.”

Clara, who’d been quiet until now, piped up. “Auntie, when I’m bigger, I’ll take care of you! I’ll make you pasta every day!”

Henry pushed a plate of peeled shrimp toward her-he’d been peeling them one by one since dinner started, not saying a word, just making sure she had her favorite.

Scarlett’s eyes watered. For five years, she’d slaved for the Stewarts, and they’d never said “thank you”. They’d never peeled her shrimp, never saved her favorite food, never held her when she cried. But here, at home, she was loved-unconditionally.

Halfway through dinner, Clara pointed at the coffee table. “Auntie, your phone’s lighting up!”

Scarlett glanced over. The screen read “Vincent”. She’d never blocked him-she’d just kept her phone on silent, too tired to deal with his calls. She hesitated, then answered.

“Scarlett.” Vincent’s voice was tight, panicked. “Vanessa’s in the hospital. She had a mango allergy-she’s having trouble breathing. Get here now.”

Scarlett’s blood ran cold. She stood up, grabbing her bag. “I’m on my way.”

Violet stood too. “I’m coming with you. Clara, stay with your grandparents.”

Clara frowned. “No, I want to go together!”

At 10:30 p.m., Vanessa woke up in the hospital room. The first thing she saw was Scarlett sitting in a chair by the bed, her eyes red from worry.

“Vanessa? How do you feel?” Scarlett asked, leaning forward. She’d been sitting there for over an hour, watching Vanessa’s chest rise and fall, scared she’d stop breathing.

Vanessa turned her head away. She didn’t say anything-just crossed her arms, like she was still mad.

Scarlett’s heart ached. She knew Vanessa wanted Sabrina, not her. She tucked the blanket around Vanessa’s shoulders. “I’ll let you rest. I’m gonna go wait outside.”

She grabbed Clara’s hand-Violet had stepped out to get coffee-and started to leave.

“Bad mom!” Vanessa shouted, her voice echoing.

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Clara pulled her hand away. She marched over to the bed, her hands on her hips. “Vanessa! That’s not nice! Auntie drove all the way here to see you-how dare you call her a bad mom!”

Vanessa’s face turned red. “Fatty! Mind your own business!”

Clara's lower lip trembled-she hated being called fat more than anything. "You're just a spoiled brat! My aunt loves you, and you're being mean!"

Vanessa burst into tears. "Fatty! Fatty! No one will ever love you!"

"Vanessa, apologize to Clara!" Scarlett said, stepping in. She pulled Clara behind her, her voice firm. This was too much-Vanessa couldn't talk to her cousin like that, not when Clara had only been nice to her.

Vanessa cried harder. Just then, Vincent walked in, holding a cup of water. When he saw Vanessa sobbing, he rushed over, picking her up. "What's wrong, baby? Did Mom hurt you?"

Vanessa clung to him, her tears soaking his shirt. "Mom yelled at me! She took Clara's side!"

Vincent glared at Scarlett, his eyes like ice. "Is this how you parent? Yelling at a sick kid?"

Scarlett met his gaze, calm. She didn't flinch, didn't apologize. "I didn't do anything wrong. Vanessa called Clara fat-twice. She needed to be told off. If you think that's 'hurting her, then

fine. I don't care."

Vincent was shocked. This wasn't the Scarlett he knew-the quiet, compliant woman who never argued, who always apologized even when she was right. This Scarlett was different-cold, sharp, unafraid.

"Is this how you raise our daughter?" he snapped.

Scarlett shrugged. "Yep. That's me."

He clenched his jaw. "When I said Sabrina would be a better mom, I was right."

Scarlett nodded. "Yeah. You were."

Vincent froze. He'd expected her to fight, to cry, to beg him to take it back. But she'd agreed. Like it didn't matter.

Before he could say anything else, Scarlett spoke, her voice sharp, "You all act like you know what's best for Vanessa-better than her own mom. But none of you knew she was allergic to mangoes. Did Sabrina know? Did you? I told you, years ago-no mangoes, no pineapple, no nuts. But you forgot. Because you don't care about her, not really. You just care about having a 'perfect' little girl to show off."

Vincent's face turned pale. He hadn't forgotten-not exactly. He'd just... never paid attention.

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Scarlett had mentioned allergies before, but it had been years ago, and he'd been busy with work, with Sabrina, with everything but his daughter.

Scarlett didn't wait for him to respond. She listed off Vanessa's needs, her voice clear and steady. "She needs to wash her hair every other day-her scalp gets dry. She needs her flu shot next week. She can't drink cold milk before bed-it gives her stomachaches. She hates broccoli, but she needs to eat one bite a day. She's scared of thunder-you need to stay with her when it rains."

She paused, looking at him. "We're getting divorced. You need to know this stuff. For Vanessa's sake."

With that, she grabbed Clara's hand and walked out. She didn't look back.

Vincent stood there, holding Vanessa, staring at the door. For the first time in years, he felt something-something other than anger or indifference.

Guilt.

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