

## starting over

Eric's p.o.v

I walk into my house this morning and it is very quiet. Usually Vanessa is getting the kids ready for school and there is so much going on. Did they leave earlier today? I go upstairs and decide to shower and get out of these clothes. I don't need her seeing me and knowing what I have been up to. I come back down a little later and the house is still very quiet. I walk around the house, checking every room, but it is empty. I go outside, but her car is in the garage. I walk back inside and something on the table catches my eye. I grab the paper and read...

Eric,

I am leaving you and I am taking the kids. Once I am settled, I will contact you so we can see about visitations. Don't try to do anything crazy or I will tell everyone about your child and mistress. This is your chance to move on, since you love Beatrice so much and you are disgusted by me. Yes, I read the messages. You no longer have to lie. Have a nice life.

-Vanessa

Fu.ck. I rip the note up and toss it in the trash. She left me. She fu.cking left. I yell, and throw everything off the table. "You can't fu.cking leave me Vanessa." I pull out my phone and call my mother-in-law. I know she will help me. I have to make sure my father-in-law doesn't find out. Vanessa thinks her father is just like her mother, but she is so wrong. I just never let her know about it. He warned me since I began working for him. "You ever cheat on my daughter and that is your ass." he told me, and, of course, I agreed and promised never to hurt her. Everything was fine. I loved my wife, until Beatrice snaked her way into my life and seduced me. I mean, I still love my wife, it's just complicated now with Beatrice and the baby on the way. I look around the house. She left her own house. I never thought she would leave. I thought I had her wrapped around my finger. She loves me. I need to get my wife back. I will buy Beatrice a house and send her away so Vanessa won't find out. I will tell her that Beatrice lied to me. Yes, I dial my mother-in-law's number and she answers after one ring. "Hello, are Vanessa and the kids there?" I ask. "No son, is everything alright?" she asks. Shit. Maybe I shouldn't have called her. "Ummm, I just came home and they aren't here, I need to find them." I say, and hang up. I decide to text Vanessa and threaten her to be back before I get home from work, but I get in my car and go searching for them instead. If I lose my wife, I lose everything.

Vanessa's p.o.v

My sister's house is beautiful. A huge 4 bedroom house, 2 bathrooms, a big yard. Wow. She has really made a nice life for herself. On our drive here, I thought about everything she asked me and I figured out what I want to do, well the only thing I am good at. Cooking. I am a housewife and that's the only thing I have ever done right. People always love my food, so I can get a job cooking. It doesn't even matter where. I need to enroll the kids into school and go apply to every place possible. "Go outside and play", Verlene tells the kids and they do as they are told. We walk upstairs and she tells me which room is mine and which one is the kids room. I feel so bad, we will be all up in their space. "Verlene. I have some money saved up, I can rent a place." I tell her. "Buck is already out getting your place ready, sister. No worries. Now, about work. What are you good at?" she asks me. "Cooking, that's all Eric seems to like about me, the food I make." I tell her and she nods. "Great, there's a restaurant that the club manages and I am sure we can get you in there. Oh, this is perfect. You would have protection at all times." she says and I smile. "Verlene, thank you so much for this, for everything." I say. "Hey, what are sister's for?" she asks. We hear the door and go back downstairs.

"Ladies", a man who I recognize as Buck from the pictures my sister has sent me comes in. "Hun, this is my sister Vanessa, and the kids are all outside, Vanessa, this is my husband and old man Buck." she says and winks. I smile and extend my arm. "Nice to meet you Buck and thank you for allowing us to stay in your home." I say. He grabs my hand and pulls me in for a hug which surprises me. "Hey, why so formal? We are family, right? I am glad you got out of there. From the stories that this one has told me, you lived a pretty shitty life and we are going to help you." He says and as much as I don't want to cry, the tears just come. "Thank you. Wow," I laugh. "You are actually nice. When you see bikers, you assume they are assholes. They look all big and gruff." I say and they all laugh. "Nah, these guys are big teddy bears. Wait until you meet everyone." Verlene says and I wipe the tears and compose myself. "Vanessa is good at cooking, you think you guys can hire her at The Tavern?" she asks and he nods. "I'll speak to Monster, but I don't see why not." he says and my eyes widen. Monster, wow. What kind of names do these men have? "Come Hun, meet the kids." Verlene tells him and pulls her husband outside. Valeria has her brother and sister sitting on the porch while she runs around them. "Kids, come here," she yells, and they all run towards us. "Buck, these little cuties are my nieces and nephew. Julian, Valeria and Victoria. Kids, this is your uncle Buck or Joey" she says. "Are you a giant?" Valeria asks and he smiles and bends down to their level. "No, I am just a very tall man." he says. "Can I paint my arms like yours?" Julian asks. Oh boy, these kids. "Maybe when you are older little man," Buck says, and Julian smiles wide. Victoria just stands there, with her head down. My shy little girl. "Well kids, it's nice to meet you all. I have to get back to work. I will see you all later for dinner," he says, and we walk back inside with him. "Your house should be nished by the end of the week and I will let you know about the job tonight," he says, and I nod. He and Verlene make out heavily, might I add, and he leaves. Wow. I am sure I am red in the face. Eric wouldn't even hold my hand in public. I can't imagine ever doing this in front of others. My sister sighs and looks like she has hearts in her eyes. "Did he say my house will be nished by the end of the week?" I ask my sister and she nods. "Looks like it." she says. I stare at her in shock. "I don't even know what to say." I literally have no words. How are they even doing this so fast? "Hey, I told you we take care of our people." she says.

I offered to cook since we are guests here and Verlene was so excited. I served her a big glass of wine and made a charcuterie board for us to snack on. I cut up fruit for the kids and got to work. I made a roast with mashed potatoes and rolls on the side. For dessert, I made mini cherry pies. "It smells so good" my sister says. All 4 kids run inside the kitchen. "Mama, it smells so yummy in here. We are hungry, right Tori?" My niece Vanna says and tugs Victoria's hand. She nods and smiles. I smile too. Looks like Vanna is bringing Victoria out of her shell. "Daddy will be here soon, eat some fruit for now." she tells her daughter. They all grab some and run off to keep playing. Vanna runs back in and does the slide with her socks. I smile, knowing that Verlene taught her that. We used to do it all of the time. Mom hated it. Said that wasn't lady like. "Thank you for bringing my cousins to stay here. I am so happy. I love them so much." she says and grabs her mom around the neck and hugs her tightly. She kisses her cheek and runs back to play. "I am with my daughter on this. I am so happy that you guys are all here." Verlene says. So am I sis, so am I.

We sit around the big table. Buck got home a little while ago and he drank his beer and took Verlene to the corner to make out. I notice that it seems normal to Vanna. My kids look uncomfortable, clearly not used to someone showing someone else affection. "Lets go wash our hands." I say, and they follow me to the bathroom. I quickly explain to them that when people love each other, they will hug and kiss and touch each other. How everyone does things differently in their homes and not stare at their aunt and uncle. They all nod and I lead them back to the table where my sister and her family are already sitting down. The food is already on the table and Buck surprises me by standing up and serving Vanna, then my kids, then my sister, me and himself last. I sit here in shock. Where the hell did my sister find this man? This is nothing like what I am used to. He makes conversation with all of the kids and even gets Victoria to speak more than 2 words. Vanna talks about her day at school. "Mama, can we go to school too?" Victoria asks me and I nod. My little bookworm. She is so smart and loves school. Eric was upset when I put them in a head start program. It was only a couple hours a day and he said I just didn't want to take care of them. "We can enroll them in school tomorrow." Verlene says. "Will they go to my school mom?" Vanna asks and she nods. "Yes babygirl." she says and my niece squeals. "Vanessa, I spoke to Monster, you can go in tomorrow and they will show you around and do a trial run. I do not think he will be in charge personally, since he is so busy, but someone else will be there to guide you. They will see where they can place you, but by tasting this delicious meal, I don't see how they won't put you in the kitchen as the chef. This beats that basic food they tend to serve. A lot of the people don't care because they are just passing by, or they are on their way to or from getting drunk, so they just want to get something in their system, but if they eat this kind of food, I am sure more families would be coming in. This will definitely bring in more business. "Oh, wait until you taste dessert. I already had it and it is to die for." Verlene whispers loudly. She must be tipsy. The kids groan. "I want dessert." Vanna pouts "Finish up. I want to see clean plates." Buck says as she cleans his plate and serves himself seconds. My sister smiles widely. "Sister, you have magic hands. This is aaaaa-maayyyy-zinnngggg." she says, dragging the word out. "Are you tipsy hun? No more wine for you, or else you won't be getting up early tomorrow." Buck teases my sister. "Oh, but you will sure enjoy me tonight." she says and he laughs. I quickly stand up and grab dessert. I place one in front of everyone and I sit back down. All I hear are moans of delight. "Wow, wow, wow, wow," Buck says. The rest of the dinner goes smoothly. Such a peaceful environment. My kids get a taste of normal. We nish and the kids go up and start taking baths. After I get them in bed, I come back down to clean up. I am surprised to see Buck doing dishes. "Verlene passed out." he says. "I will nish the dishes. You shouldn't have to do this." I say, and he shakes his head. "I got it. I am sure you are tired, plus you are our guest. You should go up and get some rest," he says. I turn to walk away, but I change my mind and turn back around. "Thank you Buck once again. No-one has ever been this kind to me. I really appreciate what you and my sister are doing for me." I say. "Stop thanking me, we are family. I told you already." He says. "I know it's just surprising that someone wants to help a single mother out. I mean, leaving my husband because he is a liar and a cheater and abuses his family was hard." I say, and quickly cover my mouth. I have never said that out loud. "I mean, I'm 30 and I am starting over. It's embarrassing." I say. He stops washing the plate in his hand and turns to me. "Hey, you should not feel embarrassed. Embarrassing would be still dealing with his shit. Staying there and taking it, leaving and starting over is not something you should be ashamed about. You are getting a new chance at a happy life. Do not be embarrassed about putting you and your kids rst." he says, and I smile and nod. I know he is right. "Be proud of yourself. I grew up in an abusive home and I was happy when my mom left my dad. She didn't take me with her, but I was happy that she got out and didn't have to deal with it anymore. Trust me, when I tell you, your kids are thankful and will love you even more for saving them." he says. "Goodnight." I say and walk back up the stairs with a smile on my face. I am starting over and giving my kids a happy life. Tomorrow begins the new chapter in our lives.