

Diana chopped vegetables in her kitchen. Fresh from waking up, she was wearing a black tank top and sweatpants. Her fingers were slippery with juice, but the knife moved with fluid grace. The easy movements and steady pace soothed her.

Minerva burst into the kitchen, ducking through the door frame.

Diana glanced up. “Min?”

Minerva’s strawberry blonde curls were messy, her eyes wide. Her knuckles were white as she clenched her phone. “I just got a call from Mom.”

Silence. The knife wasn’t moving, Diana realized; her hands had stilled, her grip slack. She resumed chopping, but her hands were shaky. “About what?”

There was a tiny, thrown-off pause. Then Minerva’s breathless voice continued. “Nothing. Well, not nothing. She wanted to... talk. She wants to get to know us.”

“It’s a little late for that. Two years too late, actually.”

“Well, yeah, I know. But I think she really means it. She gave me a time and place to meet and everything.”

The knife clattered as Diana put it down. It looked like this conversation wasn’t going to reach its obvious conclusion yet, and she didn’t trust herself with a knife right now. After washing and drying her hands, Diana spun around to face her sister. “Are you serious?”

Setting her phone down, Minerva let herself fall into a wooden chair at the kitchen table. “You’re not even going to consider it?”

“Consider what? Mom blew her chance at being a mother a long time ago.”

Minerva shrugged. “Maybe she’s changed.”

Diana laughed, short and sharp.

Minerva’s creamy, freckled cheeks flushed. “People *can* change, Diana. Especially in twelve years.”

“Of course they can. But it takes commitment, Min, and Mom couldn’t even commit to her own kids,” Diana snapped. “Somehow I don’t think she can commit to self-care.”

“You’re not being fair,” Minerva protested. “She was grieving.”

Diana’s teeth clenched, bone scraping against bone. “We *all* were! I missed Dad, too. But did I get drunk? No! No, I cooked and cleaned and paid the bills. I was *there*. She was just... a ghost.”

They stared at each other. Usually warm and full of life, Minerva’s eyes were glassy with tears. Her words were barely audible. “Diana, are you just going to be angry for the rest of your life?”

“Always.” Diana’s voice was drained of all human warmth.

Minerva nodded slowly. Then her legs unfolded, raising her to her feet. “I’m going upstairs.” She didn’t raise her voice, but it cut through the air of the kitchen all the same. Then she was gone, and Diana was alone.

It was like a slap to the face, robbing Diana of breath. Her head sagged back against the wall, chin tilted up and throat exposed. She raked her fingers through her hair, her nails catching on tangles. Her coppery red hair was pinned back with a clip, but the movement caused a couple curls to spring free.

Curly red hair, brown eyes, bronze skin, freckles. She had inherited all of that from her mother. But that was just blood and genes and DNA. Family was more than that. It *should've* been more than that. She didn't have any control over the cards she had been dealt, but she could control how she played the game.

Diana's eyes snapped open; she hadn't even realized they were closed. She snatched the knife in a movement that didn't second guess itself. Chop the vegetables, get the sausage, put them in the frying pan, cook. In a flurry of activity, she was done.

There was enough for both of them, so Diana filled up two plates and headed upstairs. Minerva was sitting on her bed, staring unseeingly at the dark green carpet between her feet. A tear dripped from her chin. Her hands were buried in the pockets of her pearly pink sweatshirt. Her distant eyes were golden brown, like the sun shining through a glass of their mother's whiskey.

Diana dismissed the thought with a shake of her head. She sat on the fluffy comforter, and Minerva shrank away, shoulders curling in. Diana cleared her throat, jaw working painfully. "Breakfast, Minerva."

After hesitating, Minerva accepted the proffered plate and picked idly at her food. Eager for a distraction, Diana took a bite of the sausage. Flavor warmed her tongue: salt, grease, fat. So much for a distraction; even the taste carried childhood memories.

"Did you agree to meet Mom?" The words felt detached and distant from Diana, like a thought rather than something said out loud.

Sluggishly, Minerva lifted her gaze. "No. I told her I'd think about it." The wet shine in her eyes was still there, and her voice was hoarse.

Diana's breath caught in relief. That meant there was still time to talk about this, to think it over. "Good."

Minerva pressed her lips together. "I know you don't like to remember the good memories, Diana, but I do."

Good memories? Diana was confused. Then realization struck. "You mean before Dad died?"

Minerva nodded. "I'm not naïve, or making excuses. Our childhood was pretty shitty." Even though Minerva was fifteen and only five years younger than her, Diana still found it odd to hear her sister curse. An old habit. "But there were some good days. I miss them. I just wish we could go back and start over. Then I wouldn't be sad, and you wouldn't be angry."

Diana's heart ached. "Min, I'm sad too. It just... looks a lot like I'm angry."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Minerva's shoulders relaxed, her spine beginning to uncurl. A comfortable silence filled the gap between them. Instead of picking at her breakfast, Minerva took an actual bite. Diana was relieved. Appetite was a good sign, and she hadn't wanted to waste the extra food.

Diana's hand trailed down Minerva's back, smoothing the strawberry blonde hair. "It's okay to be sad about it, you know. Or angry, or regretful."

Minerva's lips twisted for a moment. Then she tilted her head and looked up. "Then why did you react like that when I told you? Like you were going to bite my head off?"

Diana cringed. How could she have done that? It hadn't helped at all, and only made Minerva more upset. "I'm sorry. I just got... scared, I guess. I don't want our mother to hurt you again."

"She might," Minerva admitted quietly. The thought sent a chill down Diana's back. "But Diana, I'm not a child. I can make my own decisions. You don't..." Minerva's voice broke. "You don't have to protect me anymore."

Diana's throat grew tight. She felt Minerva's hands wrap around her wrist, and the warmth comforted her. Minerva's hands were the color of peaches and cream. Familiar. Diana took a deep, cleansing breath. If this was going to happen, Minerva wasn't going alone. She slowly raised her gaze and smiled. "Okay. Let's go see Mom." It came out lightly.

Minerva's returning smile was radiant.

The next day, they were waiting for their mother to show up. Diana sat on a park bench, Minerva by her side. Both were bundled against the winter chill, Minerva in a robin's egg blue jacket and Diana in a sleek charcoal-colored coat. Each inhalation of cold air stung Diana's insides. She folded her arms tightly against her chest, trying to get warm. If Mom didn't arrive in five minutes, then they'd leave, no matter what Minerva said.

What if Mom got drunk and forgot?

Not my problem anymore, Diana reminded herself. Right now, her problem was to keep Minerva's heart from getting crushed.

"Hello, girls."

Diana's gaze snapped back into focus. Her mother stood a few feet in front of her. Mom's red curls were chin-length, and she wore sleek glasses. She wore an olive green coat and matching infinity scarf.

Beside Diana, Minerva rose to her feet. "Hi."

Mom's lips relaxed into a smile. "Minerva." She reached out, but Minerva hesitated, glancing to Diana for permission. Ignoring a rush of triumph, Diana studied their mother. No slurred speech, no dilated pupils, steady hands. Diana gave a curt nod, and Minerva let their mother pull her into a hug.

This silent exchange made Mom's smile waver. But she turned, her voice steady. "Diana."

Diana took a deep breath and stared into her mother's eyes. "I can't. I'm not ready for that. If I ever will be." For a moment, despite her layers of clothing, she felt bare.

Silence filled the gaps between them. Mom's expression was wiped of all life. Then she tried to smile again, fiddling with her scarf. "That's fine. I get it. I probably deserve it, too."

"Probably?" Diana repeated, her voice icy.

Their mother's hands froze. She was silent, but fire blazed in her eyes.

"Diana, please," Minerva said softly.

Diana's jaw ached, and she realized that she had been clenching her teeth. She forced her jaw to relax. Frustration thumped in her blood, fast and burning hot. "What do you want?"

Mom's eyebrows creased. "Not much. Just to share some coffee. Talk."

Diana snorted and looked away. What was there to talk about? But Minerva cocked her head. “Why now?”

A pink tinge spread across their mother’s cheeks. “Because... I’ve been a year sober now.” Sober. Diana’s heart skipped a beat.

Minerva’s eyes widened. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks, sweetie. It’s quite a milestone, and I thought it might mean I’m... ready to see you two again. If you’re willing.”

Diana could feel Minerva’s gaze on her, gauging her response, but Diana didn’t look up. She had considered if her mother was alcoholic, but now there was proof of it. Could she really blame her mother for something out of her control?

“Okay.” Diana got to her feet. “Coffee sounds good.”