
Chapter 1

Viola Spring sat up in bed, perspiration pouring from her face and dripping down her neck, finally pooling between her breasts. It happened more nights than not and she wondered whether the universe was trying to give her some kind of message. Of course, it probably had something to do with the date that was looming. The next day would mark the date that changed her life forever, not for the better. On that day three years ago, she allowed strangers to walk away with her sweet baby girl and she hadn't seen her again.

Vi would never forget those pretty blue eyes. She was only a few days old, but her daughter's eyes were those of an old soul. Had she made the right choice? She would never know the answer to that question and she would have to live with that fact, but the decision had never been about her. What did an eighteen-year-old without a decent job or a husband have to offer a child?

"Another nightmare, Vi?" an elderly grey-haired lady asked, peeking around the doorway.

"I'm okay, Gran," Vi said, quickly wiping her face with a

tissue. "I just got up to go to the bathroom and bumped my leg."

"Can I get you some chamomile tea?"

"I'm fine, really," Vi said. Was she fine? Did it even matter? She had work in the morning and it wasn't right to saddle her elderly grandma with her sadness.

"I'll see you in the morning then, honey."

"You don't have to get up so early on account of me, Gran."

"If I don't see that you eat something before you leave I will worry all day."

"I'll eat, I promise."

The old woman ignored Vi's empty promises and smiled softly. "You better get yourself to sleep, it's nearly time to wake up."

Vi did try to sleep but for some reason it just didn't happen. The usual questions circled her mind. What if she had waited? What if she had waited for a better kind of man? She scoffed. Who in their right mind could call any eighteen-year-old boy a man? An eighteen-year-old girl, that was the problem. A sheltered, immature teenager who just like the song, 'was looking for love in all the wrong places'. It was an accident waiting to happen...

"MOM, I'M EIGHTEEN." Vi begged. "I'm old enough to vote."

"While you live under my roof you will do as I say. I don't want you to end up the way I did. I want better for you."

Vi knew that life as a single mother had been hard for her mother. As much as it had been to settle for a man she'd thought would be the answer to all her prayers. "Nothing is going to happen, Mom, I swear. You were young once. Surely you remember that what is done in the dark, can be done in the daytime anywhere?" She gasped when her mother

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raised her arm with her hand flattened as though she were going to slap her.

“Go to your room, you can have this discussion with your father.”

“He’s not my father, Mom, he doesn’t even like me.”

“It’s not a father’s job to like you, Viola! It’s a father’s job to raise you right. To make sure you know what’s wrong and what’s right. To teach what it is to be a sinner and how to grow up to be a godly woman.”

“Keeping someone prisoner in their own home isn’t normal, Mom.”

“Go,” her mother yelled, pointing to the stairs.

She had stomped up the stairs to her room with no intentions of staying there. The stupid interfering stepfather must have laid down the law about her going out after dark. As far as things went with her mother everything he said was law. Vi knew that if she did as her mom told her and stayed home, he would find some other reason to punish her, he always did, and her mother never lifted a finger to protect her. Well, she wasn’t about to keep Hunter waiting. As soon as banging pots in the kitchen signaled the start of the meal being prepared, she crept back down those stairs and slipped noiselessly from the house.

“I think we’ve missed the movie,” Hunter said, as they roared away from the house in his pickup.

“I’m sorry, baby, I couldn’t get away.”

“We could just go to the clearway?”

Vi smiled. The clearway was sort of a lover’s lane. “Sure, but I can’t be out for too long.” She pushed visions of what might happen to her when she returned home out of her mind. Anyway, the time she arrived home would only be a minute factor. The major sin was defying her mother and leaving in the first place. There would be consequences, she may as well make the punishment worthwhile.

Hunter pulled the car off the clearway between some trees and took off his seatbelt. “I’ve missed you,” he said.

“Have you? I missed you too.” She slid across the bench seat of his old truck.

“Of course. Nothing I like more than making out with my baby.”

He kissed her deeply while his thumb attempted to tease one of her perky nipples that were straining through the tight, spandex, crop top that her mother made her wear instead of a bra. "I like it too," she said, kneeling so she could get closer. She just loved it when Hunter kissed her and touched her. He stirred feelings in her that she knew were wrong, but in the moment, she couldn't care less. If being evil felt this good she'd take being a sinner over being a saint any old day. She climbed on top of him, grinding herself onto him.

She grinned when Hunter unzipped her dress and yanked it from her shoulders, exposing the chaste underwear that was designed to make her look as flat and unattractive to the opposite sex as possible. The horny teen's answer was to yank it over her head and out of the way. When her rosy nipples became visible he latched onto each of them, one at a time, sucking hard until she threw her head back and squealed.

"Damn girl," he ground out. "You are really horny tonight."

"Kiss me," she said, raising his head so she could reach his lips. All the time she was bouncing and rocking, pressing herself against him.

"Lift up," he panted.

"Wait, I have to take off—"

"I'll manage," he said. He unzipped his jeans and shifted her panties to the side. "There now, give me that sweet thing."

"Yes," she whimpered as she felt him slide all the way inside her. She rocked gently, savoring his every move. He sucked and nibbled at her neck. Vi knew she would be marked but at that moment all it did was urge her on. "Oh, Hunter, baby," she cried.

"Move your pussy faster." He dug his fingers into her ass cheeks and bounced her up and down, showing her the pace he wanted. "That's it," he said as she quickened her pace.

"Do you like that?"

Hunter knew how to show her how much he loved her, and she wanted in turn to please him. "Uh huh, baby, just like that." He slapped her ass cheeks and pushed deeper into her. "Yes, baby, you know what I like."

She clung to him, no longer in control as he fucked her hard. He was

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trembling, and she knew he was close. “Hunter!” she called out as she felt him fill her. Then he’d held her tightly, while she rested her head on his shoulder, savoring the last few minutes of their fun.

“Hmm,” he said happily. “It’s late, will you be in trouble?”

“Maybe,” she said with a giggle, “but it was worth it.”

“I better take you home.”

IT NEVER OCCURRED to her that Hunter wasn't as concerned with pleasing her as she was with him. Not that Vi didn't get her own pleasure, she did but more than that, she got what she *really* needed at the time. She got to escape her miserable existence and Hunter held her—he made her feel wanted. Sooner or later though, she always had to go home and face the music.

“ARE YOU GOING TO BE OKAY?” Hunter asked.

“I’ll be fine.” She would. It wasn’t the first time she’d faced her stepfather’s wrath and it wouldn’t be the last. It didn’t last forever, and it was the price she had to pay for a short time of freedom. Still, anxiety built with each of the steps Vi took towards the front door. When she got to the last step the door was flung open to reveal her stepfather and he wasn’t happy. The first thing she noticed was his pants had no belt and the second that his hand was behind his back, hiding what was obvious.

“What have I told you about that boy?” he hissed, as she stood stock still in the doorway.

“Not to see him,” she said, her whisper so quiet it was almost silent. Vi hated that voice, the meek, invisible one that barely escaped from her lips when she answered him. Why couldn’t she be brave and stand up for herself?

“And yet, here you are, creeping in like an alley cat coming back for

its dinner. Well, it won't be dinner you'll be getting, my girl. Get yourself upstairs and wait for me."

"No, Daddy," she said quietly. She hated calling him Daddy more than she hated her simpering voice. Daddy was a name earned by a well-loved child. "Please, I wasn't doing anything wrong."

"The fact you don't recognize your sin makes it even worse." He looked at her with disgust. "Get upstairs."

She didn't argue but instead decided to try and outrun him. She darted through the door, but as she passed him the belt cracked across the back of her legs hard. "Ow," she squealed. "Daddy, no!" He had her arm and as the door slammed shut she knew she was in for more of the same.

"I won't have a daughter of mine out doing God knows what with boys."

The belt kept swinging as she danced around him, trying to get away from the burning leather.

She lay in bed that night, her nightie hiked up to her waist so the cool air from the open window could blow over her and cool her welts. Vi had tried to think of what was worse, the belt or the hatred that the man that wielded it had for her. She couldn't decide. All she knew was she had to get out of there.

As it turned out, weeks later the choice was made for her.

"YOU'RE pregnant aren't you, Viola?"

Cold fear washed over Vi and she was unable to speak. She was pretty certain her mother was correct in her assumption but had put off even acknowledging the possibility. Her stepfather would kill her, and Hunter had broken up with her the week before. He told her he wanted a girlfriend who was allowed to go to prom. The sneaking around wasn't fun anymore.

"Answer me, girl!"

"I... I don't know."

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Her mother produced a test. "Go and pee on this stick. I'll be waiting right here."

There was no indication on her mother's face of what she planned to do if the test was positive. As for her, she wasn't even sure she was ready to know one way or the other. Still, she took the stick and walked to the bathroom like a person on their way to the gallows.

When she emerged with the stick in her hand, her mother did something she never thought she would do. She cried. "How could you? Have you seen how hard my life is? I didn't want you to be saddled with a baby while you're still in your teens."

"We don't have to tell Daddy."

"He's the one that suspected it. He bought the test."

Vi slumped onto the bed. "He'll kill me," she said.

"No, he says that you will stay inside this house until you've had the baby. We will raise the baby as our own. Nobody has to know."

"No," Vi said. For the first time since she suspected she was pregnant, Vi felt an overwhelming urge to protect her baby. "I will not let that man anywhere near my child."

Her mother scoffed. The softer side already gone. "What other choice do you have? Do you want everyone in the church, in the neighborhood, to know what kind of girl you've become?"

"If they want to judge me like that, then I don't care what they think," Vi said. "Don't you worry about me; I'll do this on my own."

"No, you won't," her mother said. "He won't let you."

"He can't stop me and neither can you."

"I don't want to stop you. Do you think I want to spend the next eighteen years raising another bastard child? You can stay with your grandmother."

The words surprisingly didn't even sting. Her mind was hung up on what could only be described as hope. Hope that would only come in the form of her beloved grandma. "Do you think she'll let me?"

"Yes, but you won't be able to come back here, and I can't help you financially, you're on your own now, my girl. You better just hope she can afford to feed you."

“Okay.” She didn’t want any of her mother’s money or anything else she had to offer. Especially when anything her mother owned came from him. Just lead me to Grandma’s house, she thought. Her grandma had always been one of her favorite people, but her visits to her grandma’s house had been few and far between. Who knew that a talk with her mother would actually give her peace. There was a first time for everything.

“I MADE YOU SOME OATMEAL, Vi. I think you better get up. It’s nearly time for you to leave,” Her grandma said, breaking into her thoughts.

“Sorry, Grandma, I didn’t sleep until the early hours.” For some unknown reason, memories about all that she’d been through were close to the forefront of her mind and she didn’t seem to be able to shift them. “I’m coming now. I’ll just have a shower first.”

“You do that, honey,” the older lady said.

How had she been so lucky to end up here with this gentle woman? The big question was, how had this gentle woman raised her witch of a mother? From the moment she knocked on her grandma’s door, she had enveloped her with love. She stood under the hot spray and her mind drifted back to that first day...

“Vi?” the elderly lady asked. “Is that you?”

Vi stood, suitcase in hand, unable to find words to explain how or why she came to be standing there on her grandmother’s doorstep. So much rested on her grandma’s acceptance, she didn’t have a plan B. What if she turned her away? “Yes, Grandma Lillian, it’s me. Do you remember who I am?”

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“Of course, I remember who you are!” the woman said, taking the bag and pulling her into the house. “You are my only granddaughter; how could I forget you? There has never been a day I didn’t think of you, or a night that I didn’t say a small prayer for God to protect you.”

“Grandma, I know it’s a lot to ask but could I stay with you for a bit?” Her eyes filled with tears. Asking for charity was never an easy thing for her. “I don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“As if you have to even ask, I’ve longed for this day.”

Now, for the hard part, fear twisted in her belly. “I have to tell you something first, it’s only fair.” Vi fiddled with her raggedy ponytail, one hand instinctively protecting her still flat belly.

“You want to tell me that you’re having a baby?”

Vi was shocked that her grandma had guessed her secret and even more stunned that she didn’t seem to mind. “Um, well, ah, yes, but how did you know?”

“There are signs,” Lillian said with a smile. “When I opened the door, you had your hand on your belly, like you were protecting something, you still do. Only one thing that you could be protecting in there,” she said with a chuckle.

“Are you okay with this? I mean, you don’t mind?” Vi asked.

“Why would I mind about an innocent little tot? Especially one that will be my great grandchild.” Lillian smiled.

Vi did something she hadn’t allowed herself to do up until that point, she burst into tears.

“Oh, honey, everything will be okay.” Lillian hugged her tightly. “You poor little thing, I bet you’ve been worried sick all the way here. How did you get here?”

“My mother bought me a bus ticket,” Vi said through her sobs.

“Oh well, it might have been the kindest thing she did for you yet, to get you away from that man. I’m just sorry I couldn’t have taken you away from there myself sooner.”

“She couldn’t wait to see the back of me.”

Lillian said nothing for a minute and then grinned. “You know

what we need? A little bit of cheer. I'll get us something to eat, a hot drink and then we'll go to bingo."

"Where is bingo, Grandma?" Vi asked as they walked along the sunny, tree lined street.

"The church hall, not much further to go."

Vi stopped in her tracks. "You won't tell them I'm pregnant, will you?"

"Why ever not?"

"It's a church! Won't they think I'm an evil sinner?" Vi had been told her whole life what God thought about sinners, she thought she'd finally escaped all the judging.

"Not all churches are like that, honey. In my church, God loves everybody."

"SORRY IT'S ONLY OATMEAL, HONEY," Lillian said, as she sat down at the table.

"I love the way you serve oatmeal, Grandma," Vi answered with a smile. This woman could serve burnt toast and make you feel like you were eating pancakes and bacon.

"Why don't you call in sick today, Vi? Have yourself a little nap."

"I can't, Grandma," Vi said. "But I'll get an early night tonight if I can."

"You need some fun, Vi, it isn't good for you to hang around here punishing yourself forever you know."

"Who said I'm punishing myself? I just get tired after work, that's all."

"Hmm, you tell yourself that enough times and you just might believe it. You didn't do anything wrong, it's normal for teenagers to do those things these days. It was up to your momma to teach you about contraception and such." Lillian

walked over to the mantel and picked up a photo that Vi had given her and brought it to the table.

Vi looked at the photo of the sweet, little girl in her pretty dress full of frills. It was one sent to her from the adoption agency as agreed upon with her partly open adoption. While she wasn't permitted direct contact, she received a photo every year. This was last years and her favorite. She smiled at the photo. "She does look happy doesn't she, Grandma?"

"That she does. The decision you made to give that baby girl up for adoption was one of the most mature and selfless things I've witnessed. You hold your head up, girl." She kissed the top of Vi's head.

Vi put the photo down on the table next to where her grandma was about to start her own breakfast and 'read the paper'. Vi smiled. What her grandmother called reading the paper was actually going on Facebook. She loved to trawl her friends' pages and see what they were all up to. She played the odd game of bingo or slots. A lot of her friends were people she'd never met and hardly spoken to. Still, she felt somehow invested in their lives. Vi gave Lillian a kiss. "I better go and get ready, I'll be late."

A while later she returned to find her grandma in the same spot. "I'll see you this afternoon, Grandma. Is there anything you need me to get on the way home?" Her grandma didn't answer. She was staring at her laptop. "Grandma?"

"You need to look at this." Lillian had gone white. Her eyes were flicking from the photo in front of her to the one online and back again. "I think this is the same child."

Vi was across the room in a couple of steps and she looked where Lillian was staring. There on the Facebook page of a stranger, was a photo very similar to the one on the table. It was definitely the same little girl; she was even

wearing the exact same dress. The only difference between her photo and this one was the adults who were sitting side by side with the child between them. They were all laughing at whoever took the photo. So, it was obviously taken the same day. Vi dropped into a chair beside her grandma. “Oh no,” she said, reading the post that the person had written. “No, no, no, it can’t be so.” She read out loud, just so she could try and understand what she was reading.

“Today marks one year since my beautiful, baby girl passed. Never a day goes by that I don't miss her.”

Her baby had died? She’d sent her away to have a better life and she hadn’t had a life at all? Surely, there wasn’t a God so cruel. “It can’t be,” she said, barely able to choke the words out. “My baby can’t be gone.”

“Look at the profile picture,” Lillian said. “It’s an older woman. I don't think it’s the little girl who died.”

Vi scrolled down all the comments. There was one from a man who must be the father. Wait. The post on Facebook wasn’t from the father of her baby it was from the grandmother.

Rose and I miss her too, Kath, every day.

This comment was from the man who must be the adoptive father. There was no reply to his comment from the mother? Mother in law? The man’s profile picture was the little girl. She was alive. Vi felt an overwhelming sense of relief, followed very quickly by a wave of guilt. How could she be happy that a young woman had died? Because it meant that her daughter was still out there somewhere living her life, hopefully happy. Her daughter’s name was Rose. “I won’t be going to work today after all,” she said.

So much information all at once, she knew nothing of her baby’s whereabouts, now all of a sudden, she knew her name, her father’s name and she knew the poor little girl, Rose, had lost her momma. She didn't know where or what

to do. She had no clue where to start or if she should start looking at all.

“What are you going to do?” Lillian asked.

“I have no idea,” Vi said. “I made promises, but I only made them because I truly felt that was best for my baby, for Rose. Now, she’s lost her mother. I’m so confused, part of me wants to stick to the agreement and the other part thinks all bets are off, I have a right to know what’s happening with my child. What do you think, Grandma?”

Lillian shook her head. “I don’t know, my darling, only you can make this decision. We have his name though, so it shouldn’t be too hard to find him. Maybe call him and tell him how you came to know what happened.”

Vi nodded her head. “Yes, that sounds like a plan to me.” For about the millionth time, she thanked God she had her grandma, she always knew what to do.

CURTIS STONEHOUSE SLAMMED the car door and ran into his house, panic rising in his throat at the sound of his daughter screaming. “What’s wrong?” he yelled as soon as he had the door open.

“Nothing’s wrong, really,” a woman in her late twenties said.

“Then why is my daughter screaming, Ray?” Curtis had already picked up Rose and was comforting her as he spoke. The little girl covered her face in her father’s shirt.

Rose lay her head on his shoulder and sniffled. “She said she was gonna cut my hair off,” she said.

Curtis looked at the nanny with disbelief. “You said what?”

“I didn’t say that, not exactly.”

The woman looked guilty to Curtis. “What *exactly* did you say to Rose?”

“She wouldn’t let me brush her hair, it was full of knots.”

“The brush was hurting,” Rose said. “She’s mean, and she was hurting me.”

Ray stood there saying nothing.

“I asked you what you *said* to my daughter?” Curtis was losing patience. He was a fair man and wanted to give this woman a chance to explain, but he wasn’t going to give her much longer.

“I told her if she didn’t let me brush out the knots then I would have to cut it all off, but I didn’t mean it literally. I wouldn’t cut her hair without asking you.”

Curtis stared straight through the woman, he could barely contain the anger that welled up in his throat. He wanted this woman out of his house and away from Rose. At first, everything had seemed okay, but it was obvious of late that Rose didn’t like Ray, he was starting to see why. Was he overreacting? Where Rose was concerned he didn’t care, she was his top priority, his only priority. “Take a seat in my office please, I’m just going to get Rose a snack, some juice and turn the TV on.”

Once Rose was settled, he returned to his office, making sure to stand in the doorway where he could keep an eye on his daughter. “Please go and pack anything you have here; I’ll write you a check for the month.”

“You’re *firing* me?” Ray asked. “On the word of a three-year-old?”

“Yes, you scared her, but that isn’t the only reason I’m letting you go. My daughter isn’t happy with you, Ray. Rose is a small girl who has lost her mother. The person that looks after her on a daily basis needs to be extraordinary. They must have a balance. To be able to keep her routine, while giving her all the loving attention she needs. That person

needs to love Rose and care about what's best for her. I'm sorry, but you are not that person." He watched as Ray packed up her things and walked out the door. "Now what?" he asked himself out loud.

Back to the drawing board. He was going to have to find a new nanny for Rose. He had hoped that Ray was the answer to his prayers. She wasn't a teenage babysitter, she seemed nice and loved children, supposedly. Her references were impeccable. Who knew she would turn out to be so lacking in patience? He wasn't an idiot, he knew how stubborn his child could be and he didn't allow her to overpower him. He believed in discipline when warranted but that wasn't discipline. Scaring a child with threats or anything else was just cruel. If he did have to punish Rose, he preferred a time out. Really if she was getting difficult it was for one or two reasons; either she needed one on one attention or she needed a nap. If only he could just stay home and take care of Rose himself, but he was the only doctor in their small town, he had a practice to run. Right now, though, he would pick up the pieces and spend some time with Rose and while he was in town he would put an ad in the general store window. Maybe he would have more luck with someone close by or passing through than just by using an agency.

"Hey, poppet?" he said. "Daddy thought you might like to go to town and have some ice cream, would you like that?"

"Is Miss Ray gone?"

"Yes, she is," he said. "What about some ice-cream?"

The little girl nodded enthusiastically. "I love ice-cream," Rose said, her problems seemingly gone with Ray's exit.

"I know you do. I even know your favorite flavor, you like pink."

"Pink is a color, Daddy, not a flavor." Rose giggled happily.

Curtis smiled, so relieved to hear his daughter's tinkling laughter again. It never ceased to amaze him how articulate Rose was for her age. He put it down to her mom being a teacher. She had read to their baby from the moment they brought her home with them from the hospital. "Aren't I silly?" He took the little girl's hand and walked her to the bathroom. "Let's get you fixed up and then we'll get some ice cream and go see Trish."

"I like Trish," Rose said. "She ain't mean."

"Isn't," Curtis corrected, "and no, she is not mean."

CURTIS WALKED into the old house that served as his doctor's office with Rose in tow. The child's hands were covered in strawberry ice cream. "Hi, Trish."

"I thought this was your afternoon off," the middle-aged woman said. Trish worked for the doctor before Curtis and had stayed on after the older man retired.

"I thought it was your day off as well, but I knew you'd be here," he said with a smile.

"Just taking the opportunity to get some paperwork done while I don't have patients trooping through every five minutes. What's your excuse as if I have to ask? Hello, my little Rosie bear!" She gathered the sticky little girl into her arms, not caring at all about getting messed up herself.

"I had ice-cream," Rosie said with a giant grin.

"You don't say," Trish shook her head. "I never would have guessed that."

"Yep, we just need a quick clean up before I put her in the car," Curtis said. "Come on, missy."

"Has something happened to your n.a.n.n.y.?" Trish called out.

"I f.i.r.e.d her," Curtis answered. "Long story. Would you

have a minute to put a notice in the general store window for me, please, and maybe the paper?"

"Sure, I will." Trish smiled. "What would you like me to say?"

"I'll leave that up to you. I haven't had any luck so far myself. Maybe you would know what I'm looking for. I need someone special." Curtis picked up Rose and headed for the door. "Thanks, Trish, I know I can trust you."

"No problem, you just leave it to me."

Vi and her grandmother had no idea where to start even though they had the father's name. "How about a Google search?" Vi suggested. They typed in the name.

"There's so many," Lillian said. "How can we narrow it down?"

"I guess we can look at more of his Facebook page," Vi said. "Maybe it would have his occupation."

"Good idea but I already tried that, it's private."

"I have an idea; why don't we try one of those people search things. We know his name; we know Rose's name. Maybe the white pages?" Lillian asked.

"I don't think they include children."

"I know what we can try. I have no idea if it will work. This photo is like a professional photo shoot, right? What if we drop the photo into photo booth and cut out the picture of Curtis?" She demonstrated as she did just that. "Then we can do a reverse image search of the cut picture. We might just get lucky."

"Bingo!" Lillian said a few minutes later. "He has a LinkedIn account."

"How do you know about all this stuff, Grandma?" Vi asked.

“I did a free class for seniors.”

“You amaze me. How did my mother ever come from you?”

“Your mother wasn’t always the way she is now, your stepdad had a lot to do with the finished product,” Lillian said sadly. “Anyway, back to this. Let’s look at his LinkedIn account.”

“That’s him,” Vi shouted.

“He’s a doctor!” they both said at once.

“And his number is right there,” Vi said, staring at the profile like it was the Holy Grail, in a way it was.

“Now, what are you going to do with this information?” Lillian asked. “You need to think about this, you can’t just go like a bull at a gate. You need to know *exactly* what you are going to say.”

“I could just say—” It wasn’t going to be as easy as she first thought. “Hi, this is Viola Spring, I was just ringing to offer my condolences.”

“Honey, it was a year ago. What if he was to say, who are you, Viola, and how did you know my wife?”

“Maybe I should tell him the truth,” Vi said. “I could say, I’m your baby’s birth mother, I don’t want anything from you, I heard you lost your wife and just wanted to know that the baby I gave you is okay.”

Lillian blew out a deep breath. “Whew, it isn’t a lie, but you could open up a can of worms with *that*.”

“If I can’t lie and I can’t tell the truth, what *can* I say?” Viola was feeling extremely frustrated. She knew her grandmother was right, but her little girl was on the other side of the phone that belonged to the number right in front of her. She couldn’t just do nothing, she had to try.

“I really don’t know but maybe you could keep it more... vague. After all, it isn’t a lie if you’re protecting everyone involved, I don’t think it is anyway.”

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Vi sat there thinking for a few minutes. “I could pretend to be doing a survey,” she said.

“I would tell you, no, thank you, and hang up.”

“You know what, Grandma? I’m going to go with the truth.”

“Then if that’s your final decision, I’m behind you all the way, Vi, I just want you to be sure,” Lillian said. “I’m going to find something to busy myself with outside, so you can have some privacy.”

“Thanks, Grandma.”

Vi stared at her phone for what must have been five minutes before she got up the courage to call. Her fingers were shaking as she punched in the numbers. She had to breathe very deeply to stop herself from crying. Fabulous first impression, if he answered the call to hear her sobbing on the other end. Not that deep breathing would go over that much better. She would just have to get herself together and do neither once she heard his voice.

“Dr. Stonehouse speaking,” Curtis said.

“Um, hi, my name is Viola Spring,” Vi said nervously.

“Viola,” Curtis said. “I guess you’re calling about the position?”

Vi blinked rapidly. This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. “The position?” she practically choked out.

“I assume you’re phoning about the position of nanny, for my young daughter.”