

Eight

Christine dropped Modra and Julie off at around 11:30 PM then went straight home to check on her husband and make sure he wasn't starving or anything. Bill had messaged her a few times earlier asking for help on how to warm his dinner. Christine was always baffled by his brilliance in the office and his total ineptness in the kitchen.

When Modra and Julie walked in they found Kevin on the couch snacking on a bag of Ghirardelli semi-sweet chocolate chips watching some old movie on TNT.

"Hey, babe," Kevin said, standing to greet his wife and sister-in-law. "How was the show?"

"The show, the food, the wine . . ." Julie said, dazzled. "Today was amazing and a much needed distraction." She smiled and gave a big nod in confirmation of her own exuberance.

"Wow," Kevin said with a raised eyebrow and a sideways grin, "did you meet a guy or something?" Kevin eyed his wife for details. He was buying time.

Modra smiled and walked into the kitchen, dropping her coat on the couch as she walked by. "No, she doesn't need to meet a guy when she's hanging out with two very cool chicks who know how to make it happen."

"What exactly do cool chicks like you make happen?"

The girls winked at each other and laughed as Modra opened a bottle of Pinot Noir for a nightcap around the coffee table. They sat on the floor blabbering about everything, reliving everything from the unique San Francisco people watching experience to the theater show, even singing parts of the songs for Kevin's amusement. Julie did most of the talking while Kevin and Modra exchanged satisfied glances; they had treated Julie to today as a grateful gesture for her support. It was also a lot of fun for Modra to know she had been a part of what her sister called "the most satisfying day I've had in a very long time".

"Honestly." Julie proclaimed, "I just never get enough of that city."

Modra smiled and said, "No kidding." Then turned to Kevin, "Julie made us stop just over the Golden Gate Bridge so that she could just stand there in the freezing cold and stare at it for close to ten minutes." She shivered at the thought, "I bet she would have stood there longer if it hadn't been so bone chilling cold tonight."

Kevin gave Julie a silly look to remind her that she had seen the Bridge a million times.

Julie was about to speak mid-sip when the wine went down the wrong pipe and got her coughing like a long-time smoker. Still coughing and with watery eyes, she finally made her point, "You guys see the Bridge and the City so often you take it for granted." She took another sip of her wine hoping it would

relieve the coughing. “And there was something about today and how the city felt” she paused in thought before continuing with her heart felt explanation, “I don’t know how to explain it. I just had this, this wonderful feeling inside all day today and when we drove over the Golden Gate Bridge, I felt nostalgic. I happened to look back and suddenly San Francisco looked like it was all dressed up and the Golden Gate Bridge was its diamond necklace. I needed to stop and stare at it so I could keep every detail of that picture forever in my mind.” She released her breath slowly, wishing she could experience today’s events one more time.

Modra watched her sister with curiosity, she was being overly sentimental making her wonder what was brewing below the surface but she couldn’t put her finger on it. The emotion in her voice was too heavy and too raw; her body language enunciated every word but then would drop and her shoulders would sag like a wet rag. If Modra didn’t know better she would have written it off as too much wine, but Julie was being overly emotional about everything as if she was clinging to something desperately.

“I know I sound ridiculous but I have to confess . . . with everything that’s been weighing on my mind,” Julie said, looking at Modra who was privately dissecting everything she said, wondering what exactly had her so emotional. “And with the three of us running around all over that big, beautiful city... well, it just made me feel like everything was going to be just

fine.” She was full of emotion as she said, “I felt today like I felt when I had first met Tom. I had been so happy that day—delusional, but happy.”

Modra was suddenly utterly confused by what her sister was saying. She couldn’t possibly be this emotional over Tom getting remarried, could she? He had been such a jerk to her after they were married, and he had been an even worse husband once she had Daniel. Could it actually be possible to want someone back after hating him with every fiber of your body? Tom had put Julie through hell while they were married *and* after. It just didn’t make any sense for her to be this weird over his re-marrying. *Good riddance*, she thought to herself and said, “I have to be honest, I look forward to this trip every year because we always have so much fun.”

The girls’ personalities always became unleashed by the ambiance of San Francisco. They became bubbly, almost like high school girls as they dashed from shop to shop before their theater show. It had become an annual pilgrimage they all looked forward to.

Kevin watched the exchange between the sisters and loved it. He envied the way Modra and her sisters got along. It was always obvious how much they loved each other even when they argued. He used to wonder why they couldn’t always have harmony, but then as he got to know them better he realized that they were all too different. They were each very opinionated, had very different beliefs, and not to mention, very different

lives. But they always made up and eventually, someone swallowed their pride and bit their tongue and they got over their disagreements. He cleared his throat to remind them he was still there and let them know they were getting a little too mushy.

“Oh, sorry honey, we didn’t mean to brag about our day,” Modra said, embarrassed. She hoped they hadn’t been too inconsiderate of the poor guy knowing full well he most likely spent his day sitting on the couch. “Your day must have been dreadfully dull. I hope Veloria’s visit made it a bit more exciting for you.”

As if on autopilot, his body stiffened at the mention of Veloria’s name. Then, trying to relax his pose, he cleared his throat and said, “Well, she actually did bring a lot of excitement.”

“Ohhhh. She’s so sweet.” Julie said with a nurturing smile that stretched from ear to ear. “She is such a good girl. I just love how much she adores her Uncle Kevin. I just don’t know many teenagers who would take time out of their day to hang out with an old man.”

Kevin gave her a funny look as Modra squeezed to his thigh for him to let it go and said, “I really want to hear all about Diego. Is he good to Veloria? Do they make a cute couple?”

“I bet they make a gorgeous couple, I mean look at the both of them.”

Kevin gave Julie a look to let her know that she was acting like a dingle bat as he wondered to himself just how he should

go about answering the question. Under the circumstances he felt it would be safe to assume that he was very good to her so he responded with a wholehearted “Yuup.” accompanied with strong confirming nod then said, “I’m pretty sure they are both very good to each other.” Then he pursed his lips and stopped himself from saying anymore.

Modra seemed pleased. “I’m really glad to hear that. He really seems like a good kid.” Kevin was mechanically nodding his head not sure what to say. He needed Julie to go to bed so he could talk to Modra in private. “So,” Modra continued, “were you nice to him or did you feel the need to play the big bad uncle?”

Oh if only, Kevin thought. He would have loved to have played the big bad uncle role with the little twerp. “Um, Diego didn’t make it today. I sort of got the gist of their relationship from my conversation with Vel. She said she wasn’t quite ready to... to ... to have him come over today.”

“Oh.” Modra said with disappointment, “that’s too bad. I was hoping you’d give us the scoop on him.”

“Yeah...well.” He stopped himself wondering if he should mention anything while Julie was around, but he was anxious for Modra to know because they needed to hatch a plan on how to help poor Veloria by morning and Julie didn’t seem anywhere near ready for bed. The look on Kevin’s face said there was something on his mind that he wanted to share but all he could accomplish were failed attempts at speaking. He would start to

say something then stop himself, every time his eyes would park on his sister-in-law.

“What is it?” Modra asked wondering why he didn’t just come out and say what he needed to say. “Are you uncomfortable? Do you need me to get you something?”

“Hmhhhhh.” He hesitated, rubbing his eyes then said, “No. I...oh what the hell, Julie’s here for another week. She would either find out from you or Christine anyway, so I’m not crossing any lines.”

Julie shrugged when Modra looked to her for a clue as to what her husband was eluding to. They then both turned their attention to Kevin and stared at him expectantly.

“Is everything ok?” Julie asked with concern. “Does you peepee hurt?”

Modra elbowed her to shut up.

He gave her a mean look then looked around the living room as he tried to come up with the best way to say it. He hadn’t considered that telling Modra about Veloria’s pregnancy would be the hardest part; he had spent most of his day mulling over how best to tell Bill and Christine, not his own wife. The look of suspense on Modra and Julie’s faces only complicated his chore. *Ugh!* He said to himself, hating nothing more than being the bearer of bad news, especially after they had enjoyed such a wonderful day.

“Ok, here goes.” But he paused again and furrowed his brow as he focused his attention on Julie, “But before I say it we

should clear up a few things. What I'm about to tell you stays in this house until we figure out what we're going to do." He turned to Modra and took her hands in his, "even though you may want to, you are not allowed to call Christine." Next he turned to Julie "And you, because you are such a staunch Catholic...and because I want to continue loving you, I am going to ask you to think about what you want to say before you say it."

Julie and Modra exchanged a shocked look and gave him a nod to let him know they would do as he asked.

Satisfied with their agreement he began, "Veloria came by today . . ."

"Yes, we already know that," Modra cut him off wanting to get to the core of it.

"Is she all right?" Julie asked as she got up off the floor and took a seat next to Kevin on the couch and opposite Modra.

"Shush, Julie. Let him speak," Modra demanded. "Say it already, what is it?"

Kevin's head bobbed to the left and right as if to confirm that she was sort alright but not really. Then realizing there was no easy way to say it, he simply blurted it out "She's pregnant." He said it and kept his eyes on Modra. Her eyes immediately welled up with shock and disappointment.

Julie lost all color. Kevin was bothered when he saw what seemed to be envy flash across her face.

“No, that’s impossible. Tell me you’re joking,” Modra demanded, causing Kevin to focus his attention back on her. “She’s too smart for that.”

“Of course he’s joking. Christine would have said something to us. She didn’t even drop a hint.”

“You’re right. We spent all day together and never once did she bring it up or allude to it. And even if she wasn’t planning on sharing the news with us right away, which I am sure she would, she certainly didn’t behave like the mother of a pregnant eighteen-year-old,” Modra said as she thought back to their day together with Christine, who had been the most carefree personality of the three of them.

“That’s because she doesn’t know yet,” Kevin said, rubbing his temples. “Veloria found out today after you left.”

They both stared at him expecting him to say he was messing with them, but he didn’t. He sat with pursed lips not knowing what to say in response to his wife’s sad face.

“Oh. What about Bill?” Modra’s voice dropped off when Kevin shook his head to confirm that he also hadn’t been told yet. She thought for a moment then said, “Tell me what happened. What did she say? Is it for sure? Is it by that kid Diego? I want to know all of it.” Modra closed her eyes, hating herself for having teased Christine; it seems she had been right to worry after all: Veloria had now officially ruined her life.

Kevin slowly went through his conversation with Veloria and answered both of their questions as best he could. All he

really knew was that she was pregnant; he didn't really know how she felt about it except that she was scared. When he told them about the birth control, Modra's shoulders dropped and her head fell into her hands. Kevin knew she was asking herself why Veloria hadn't come to her, or Julie, or any of a number of people that she had at her disposal. He confessed his hesitation in dispensing advice to Veloria, and added that she might show at any time looking for their help.

Modra felt a sharp pain in her chest. She wasn't sure that she wanted to witness her best friend's reaction when she found out her daughter was pregnant. "There is no easy way to tell a parent . . . is there?" She looked to Julie for a response.

"No," Julie said solemnly, shaking her head, "I'm not sure how I would react." Then, something clicked in her mind, and without hesitation, she asked, "Is she keeping it?" She didn't have to ask where Kevin or Modra stood on the subject; she just hoped Kevin hadn't already talked her into having an abortion.

"Jeez," Modra said more to herself than to Julie, "I hope not! She's only eighteen." She quickly realized that Julie disapproved of her answer and said, "Oh good god, give me a break Julie." Julie just glared at her. Then, trying to tone it down and avoid an argument with her sister Modra said, "She doesn't have time for a baby, don't you see that she's way too young and too immature?" But Julie didn't answer or look away making Modra sorry that she had spoken out loud. The fire was in Julie's eyes and she knew right away that she was in for it. But

she was determined to stand her ground and not give in to Julie's morality lecture. This was not about her. It would not be her call. Modra eyed her sister wondering why she would want Veloria to ruin her life by having this baby. What is so wrong with giving the girl time to get her life together first, then have a baby. Of course, Modra was sure she would once again come off as cold and calculating, but this time she didn't care. "Sister, Veloria has worked very hard to get this far, she's not going to throw it all away on a whim when she's so close to the finish line. She made a mistake, that's all."

Julie pulled her hair back and tied it into a ponytail. There was a disgusted look on her face. "You know, I made a mistake. I was seventeen when I got pregnant with Daniel, and I kept the baby. I am only sorry I didn't get pregnant with a second one right away. Regardless of how you feel, a baby is a gift from God that should be accepted when given."

Kevin closed his eyes in a "What did I say?" fashion and was about to remind Julie about the habit she had of imposing her religious beliefs on others, when Modra put her hand on his leg to let him know she had it under control. Modra usually tried to keep her protective husband out of her arguments with her sisters because regardless of what the sisters said to each other, in the end, they still had to love each other.

Modra shifted her weight so that she was squarely facing Julie, who was waiting to hear what she had to say. She could tell that Julie was ready to bite back regardless of what she said.

“Listen, sister, I love you and Daniel with all my heart, but we both know that you sacrificed a lot when you decided to keep him.”

Julie growled something and said, “You know... I’m going to concede that you’re right. I did give up a lot and my life did change. But it doesn’t mean I regret my decision. It doesn’t mean that my life would have been any easier or harder had I not kept him. It ...”

“Only means that you have spent half of your life wondering what could have been.” Modra said cutting her off. “Don’t pretend I’m wrong, we’ve had that conversation way to many times for you to tell me I’m wrong.”

“Again, your right, but that doesn’t mean anything.” It doesn’t matter what you do with your life or where it goes, people will always find themselves wondering what would have happened if they would have married a different person, taken a different job, or had a baby. If I had to do it all over again, I’d still decide to keep him. He’s been the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

“And I applaud you for that, but it worked out for you. It doesn’t work out for everyone. That is your life and so you rightly got to make the call. I personally believe that an eighteen-year-old getting pregnant without planning for it is not a blessing in any possible way . . . I believe it’s a *consequence* of being an immature teenager and nothing more.”

“A consequence! You can’t believe that! A baby is not a punishment or a life sentence!” Julie insisted as she gave her older sister a look of disgust. “You live in a world that lacks moral standards. How could you feel that way? No wonder mom’s disappointed in you.”

“You know Julie, I’m done carrying whether mom’s disappointed in me or not. My morals are firmly in place, they’re just not the same as yours, so get over it.”

Kevin was tragically caught between Julie and Modra. He kept his expression blank, though inside he wished he would have waited for Julie to have gone to bed before discussing Veloria’s situation. How could he not have known how this would end? He knew from experience the venom Modra’s family could spew when it came to pro-choice topics.

“Listen, we are all human and we all make mistakes. I feel that Veloria is pregnant because her hormones got the best of her and she made a stupid mistake. And because it is *her* stupid mistake, I believe *she* has the right to choose to keep it or not.” Modra looked at her sister, daring her to continue pushing the subject. “This is her decision just like it was your decision when you were pregnant and chose to keep Daniel.” Modra straightened her back and said, “so, unless you’re planning to support Veloria financially at the level to which she would place herself in if she were to get her doctorate and then pay for her baby’s whims, wishes and education, then by all means, talk her

into keeping that baby. Otherwise, keep your opinions to yourself and let her and her parents decide what is best for her.”

There was a visible hatred in Julie’s eyes as she said, “you have such incredibly...incredibly...”she was looking for the right words, “incredibly awful points of view.”

Kevin squirmed in his seat wondering why he was sandwiched between the two of them as they yelled at each other through him. Both were grinding their teeth as they exerted every bit of control within them to keep from reaching across and giving the others hair a solid pull. It would have been humorous were it not such a serious situation.

“I know I do.” Modra said feeling just a little ashamed of herself, “but this is not about me. What my point is, is that this is her choice not yours. Your opinion should be known by only you.”

“Fine, it’s her choice,” Julie said with distaste. Building up her courage to speak her mind further adding, “But you, you say things and you have this cold point-of-view about having kids as if . . .” Julie paused, looking for the words to clearly make her point.

“As if what?” Modra challenged. She crossed her arms in a defensive pose.

“Okay, I think that when you see people with children, it’s like you see the parents as sort of a brick house.”

Modra had no response to Julie's odd analogy. She couldn't begin to know what in the world her sister wanted to say, though the analogy did seem vaguely familiar.

Kevin hid his smile. He knew that Julie was too nice to choose harsh words and, not least of the fact, that he too had heard that analogy before. He leaned his body back on the couch getting out of the girls way and allowing them to speak at each other without his eardrums in their path. He then closed his eyes and pretended to nap as if he weren't interested in their argument.

Julie ignored her sister's amused expression. "I know how you see parenthood. You just don't see any positives to having kids." She crossed her arms and Kevin still pretended to be asleep although he was cringing inside. "I really don't think you were kidding that time you were arguing with mom and you told her that you didn't want any of your own because all kids were good for was taking the bricks from their parent's home, one-by-one, until the house is gone and the parents are left with nothing."

Modra rolled her eyes. She had said all of that to put an end to their mother's constant pressure, but when she went to explain herself, Julie cut her off immediately.

"Oh don't. I know mom has been relentless at times." Modra's eyes bulged wanting to say their mother was relentless all of the time, but Julie again wouldn't let her speak. "I don't

care. Your true feelings came out in that one moment and you can't take your words back and pretend you never said them.”

Modra shook her head as she realized just how pointless it was to even try and defend herself. She had crossed some moral code of conduct by not having kids and was now condemned to live her life as the woman who hates children. She gave Julie a crooked smile and wondered why not having children of your own meant you disliked them to everyone around you who disagreed with your life choice when it was actually quite the opposite. Both Kevin and Modra love children; they just don't see the need to have one of their own. But alas, it would never make a difference what she said to her family, they believed what they believed about her and that was it.

Veloria's situation is a lot different from my own, Modra thought to herself, she is just too young to go down that path. Julie herself gave up her college scholarship to be a mother. She's happy now, but she had struggled so much and still on occasion wonders out loud how different her career options would be if she had only earned her four year degree in advertising.

Conceding the fight over her reputation and embracing her newly designated “anti-children” reputation, she decided it would be fun spite her sister a little more and said, “Oh, come on sister, don't you know kids like that? I do.”

Kevin picked up the sarcasm in Modra's voice, but it had been completely lost on Julie who scorned her with her look.

Julie looked so angry that Modra felt herself move back a bit to add a little more space between them. But Modra was having too much fun at her sister's expense and decided to poke at her a little more. She wanted Julie to own up to the fact that not all kids were perfect because she knew it would kill her to give Modra that much.

"Come on Julie, we both know enough bad apples..." again, she was cut off.

"Yes, whatever. There are some tough kids out there, but we are parents and we love our kids regardless."

Modra rolled her eyes and said, "of course you do, and sometimes it's hard for me to stand by and watch it...and say nothing."

"Well it shouldn't be hard. They are our kids and we choose to give them the bricks to our homes so that they can build their own homes and eventually do the same for their children." Julie's expression begged the question: Don't you get it, you idiot? And just to make sure she did, she said, "It's all part of being a parent!"

Kevin pressed his leg into Modra's asking her to drop it. Though she knew she should drop it, she couldn't. She couldn't believe she was getting *the* speech from her sister, which used the exact same analogy their priest had used at Sunday mass when they were kids, not to mention their mother, who still loved to repeat it. In fact, when Modra's mother first learned they were giving up on children, she told them their brick house

was going to crumble and blow away like dust with no one to pass it on to. Modra was tired of it and wasn't sure how Veloria being pregnant came back to her own decision to not have kids.

A rebuttal came to Modra and she smirked as she said it knowing full well it was missing Julie's point.

"But Julie, Veloria hasn't built her brick house yet, so she won't have any bricks to give her kid. Doesn't that tell you something?"

Kevin smirked. His wife could be such a pest when provoked.

Julie rolled her eyes and rubbed her hands over them. She was and wondering why she was bothering to argue with Modra. The goal had been to somehow correlate Veloria's pregnancy to her own current efforts to have a baby, but it had somehow evolved into a pro-choice debate that she would much rather not have—at least not now. She knew that if she continued the argument any longer she would be jeopardizing the reason she had come to visit in the first place.

"Julie, all I'm saying is that Veloria will be a better mother when she has matured. Right now Veloria should be learning how to become a productive member of society not how to change a diaper. She'll have plenty of time for that when she's older and more prepared for the commitment that having a baby requires. "

Modra bit the right side of her lip hoping her words connected with her sister. This was about Veloria, not Modra.

Oh hell, Kevin thought, debating whether to make them end the discussion or walk away instead. He decided to let the sisters hash it out knowing he would have enough of their emotional mess to deal with once they were done.

“Well, ladies, I’m going to go lie down in the office. Come wake me when you’re ready to get back to the real issue of concern—Veloria.”

Modra glanced at her husband as if to say she was sorry then focused her eyes back on her sister. She was frustrated because the entire conversation was out of line and unrelated to Veloria. Julie was using Veloria’s pregnancy as a pretext to tell her exactly how she felt about them not having children. “Julie, the thing is that I’m almost forty and knew myself enough to know that my psyche could not handle the sleepless nights of worrying that come with being a mom. For example, I know that if I were Christine I would be completely heartbroken right now and most likely spend all night trying to figure out what I did wrong or where I came up short as a parent. I am mature enough to know that I am not built for that. But Veloria is eighteen and can’t possibly have the foresight to understand what she’s getting into.”

Julie was telling herself to let it go and go to bed before she regretted her words, but she couldn’t. She firmly believed that if Veloria was old enough to have sex, then she was old enough to have a baby.

“Of course she does, she had the foresight to have sex didn’t she? And how would you know, you’ve never been a mother. Honestly, you never really even fought to become one.”

“Oops.” Kevin whispered mid stride and as he glanced over his shoulder at his wife, he knew immediately that Julie had pushed the magic button with that comment.

“You know what Julie, that’s fine. Let’s cut the crap,” Kevin slowed his walk as he listened to every word. “You are right. I have no idea what it’s like and yes, we both know that if I wanted kids, odds are that I could have had one with IVF. But the bottom line is that I am not built like you and Mother Nature knew that. I don’t go oogly or get weird over babies. I think they are cute and adorable and I love kids, but only in doses. I don’t have this romantic notion of parenthood that you have, the gods forgot to program me with it, so what do you want me to say?” Modra took her empty wineglass to the kitchen and refilled. “I know you don’t believe me, but it’s true. It’s exactly because I lack that emotional nurturing feeling towards motherhood that I know we made the right choice. I am sure that I would have bought myself a one-way ticket to Regretville for the rest of my life if I’d pursued having a baby. And the truth is that I know that I would have lost myself had I had a baby when I was eighteen—that makes me nervous for Veloria.”

“Had you gotten pregnant and had a baby when you were eighteen you would have made a wonderful mother. Maybe not knowing the challenges that lay ahead is sometimes a good

thing. I bet your feelings would be different today if you already had a baby because a mother's love is indescribable and you can't know what you're capable of until you become one"

Modra laughed and said, "Oh Julie. I have heard that so many times that I have lost count. I'm sure that if I had gotten pregnant when I was younger that I would have somehow floundered my way through parenthood as so much of society does, but the way I see it is that I am aware of the challenges and also very conscious of my limits. Why in the world would I put myself in a compromising position and risk my happiness for something I am already pretty sure I don't want for myself. It's like a happily married man who is committed to his wife risking his marriage by hanging out with a beautiful girl who is not his wife. The idea of her may be fun, but it all gets old in the end and that's when the real test begins. You know, when you can't take it back anymore and you realize that what you had was one-hundred times better."

Julie had stopped listening to Modra. She was stuck on the fact that her older sister had just confirmed that she could carry a baby. Julie shook her head with disappointed and asked, "Why did you lie to us and tell us you couldn't have kids?"

Modra froze and gave her sister a confused look. "What? What are you talking about? I never lied." She crossed her arms knowing she was arguing a lost cause. "What we said was that we couldn't have kids naturally and that we had agreed not to use science."

“You are such a spin doctor.” She said glaring at her sister, “Sometimes I get so mad at you. Do you know that sometimes I wish I could have your uterus? I wouldn’t take it for granted the way you have. I would do everything I could to have a baby of my own.” She closed her eyes thinking of her sleepless night the night before, “I lose nights of sleep trying to understand why I can’t have a baby and you, who doesn’t even want one, can.”

And there it is, Modra thought, the reason we are having this pointless argument. “You know Julie, we’ve had this conversation before and I’m not going to feel guilty for what you can and can’t have. And just so you know, you will not pull this guilt crap on Veloria tomorrow. She does not need to know how you feel or how I feel. All that girl will get from us will be support. Now, we are dropping this conversation because I love you and I can see myself putting you on the first flight home tomorrow if we stay on this pointless topic.”

Damn it! Julie cursed herself for getting so personal with the conversation. Why couldn’t she just shut up! The last thing she wanted to do was to have to go home without waiting for the perfect opportunity to asking Modra to be her surrogate. Yikes, now she had to figure out what she could do to get off her shit list and quick.

“Julie, if you in any way, shape, or form attempt to persuade Veloria to keep the baby because of your selfish wants or religious beliefs, I swear I will put you on the first flight out and

you will no longer be a part of my life.” Modra’s tone was strong and determined.

Julie was startled at the severity of Modra’s words.

“At the end of the day, Veloria is not our daughter. She is *my* best friend’s daughter, who has allowed us to be guests in her life. Whatever Veloria chooses to do with that baby will be in line with her and her parents’ beliefs; you and I have absolutely no say.” Modra left no wiggle room for Julie.

Kevin stood in the office afraid to come out.

“You’re right,” Julie said regretfully. “I do need to stay out of this.” She wondered if she would be able to stand by and keep her mouth shut if she heard the word ABORTION come out of Veloria’s mouth. The thought made her shudder. “My opinions are my opinions, but you have to understand that my feelings and opinions are not driven by religion. My opinions stem from the fact that I am no longer able to have a baby of my own when I so desperately want one.” And with that, tears began falling from Julie’s eyes. She didn’t try to hide them.

Kevin stopped cold in his tracks. The fax they had received earlier from Elena, their mother, suddenly made sense. He had thrown it away thinking it was a last ditch effort from Modra’s family to get them to a fertility clinic. The fax had been for Julie.

“And then,” Julie said with a great amount of despair, “I see you who could take steps to have your own baby grow inside of your body and you simply choose not to. It’s an incredibly hard

pill to swallow when everyone around me has a choice and mine has been taken away from me.” Julie’s tears were rolling down her cheeks, hanging on at her chin before letting go and falling to her lap. “And now Veloria, who shouldn’t be pregnant, is pregnant with a baby she may not want. It just seems so unfair.”

Kevin emerged from the office holding a box of tissue for Julie. He sat next to her and patted her shoulder; he had no idea of the emotional stress she had been under. He wondered why she had ever agreed to come and stay with them when she knew what they were doing.

Modra’s face softened as she considered her sister’s position. “I couldn’t begin to understand what you are feeling, I wasn’t wired for it. I’m so sorry.” Modra wasn’t sure if her sorrow was for herself or for her sister. “Julie, I love you with all my heart,” Modra said, suddenly understanding that it must have been difficult for Julie to be here when Kevin was having his vasectomy. “And I am sorry that I am just now realizing how difficult it has to have been for you to be here these past couple of days. I want to thank you for coming when Kevin asked you to. I am grateful to you.” Modra gave her sister a big hug.

Julie took more tissue from the box and blew her nose again. Her big brown eyes seemed empty; Modra looked but couldn’t find a fragment of the bubbly sister she had always known.

“I think we should just go to sleep and deal with this in the morning,” Kevin said. “Besides, I don’t think there is a solution

to the problem, Veloria is just going to have to fess up to her parents. Maybe we'll just stay in the kitchen while she does it for support."

He looked at Modra and Julie, who looked completely drained as they bobbed their heads, agreeing. They finished their wine, gave each other a hug, and went off to bed.