

SIX

Kiana left the D.J. booth, walking towards her office and looking forward to the Thanksgiving holiday. She was flying out to Indianapolis in the morning and Sean was meeting her there on Friday to stay through the weekend. They tried seeing each other whenever they had the opportunity over the past three months. Snatching time for an early morning breakfast before work, late dinner at her apartment or spending Sundays he didn't work at his apartment watching movie rentals. There were also times when she would sit in during studio sessions. He worked with such intensity that she'd swear he forgot she was there until he'd turn around to acknowledge her with a quick wink or smile.

What hit closest to Kiana's heart was that Sean had kept his word, not pressuring her about her celibacy, which, oddly enough, had her thinking more and more about it. Their kisses and caresses became so heated sometimes that she thought she would explode. She'd never been this way before and wondered if it had more to do with five years of pent up sexual frustration than Sean's kisses, which made her want to rip her clothes off and shout "take me" like some dramatic soap opera star. Kiana smiled at the image that thought brought to mind.

"That broad smile couldn't possibly be for me."

Kiana stopped mid-stride as she noticed her mother sitting outside her office.

"Hi Erica," she said, giving her a brief hug. "I wasn't expecting you."

"I know. Your assistant let me up. I wanted to see you before you left."

Kiana sat at her desk, "We just had dinner on Sunday and I'm only going to be gone for a few days."

"Is Sean still meeting you there?"

"Yes," Kiana answered distractedly trying to remember what she needed to do before for her long weekend.

"Don't you think you're moving a little too fast?"

Kiana looked up at her mother in confusion, "What?"

Erica sat in the chair in front of Kiana's desk.

"You're introducing Sean to your father so it must be getting pretty serious. I just think you need to slow down. After all, you've only been seeing each other for just a couple of months."

Kiana sighed, "What is this all about? You practically threw Sean at me after that night at Indigo and now you're worried that we're moving too fast?"

"I just don't want you to make the same mistake I did," Erica replied, finding it difficult to meet Kiana's gaze.

"I'm a 26 year old woman not an 18 year old girl and is that what I am to you, a mistake?"

Erica heard the hurt in Kiana's voice and looked up to meet her accusing gaze.

"That's not what I meant. I'm your mother. I only have your best interest at heart. I don't think getting into a serious relationship with Sean so quickly is the best thing for you right now."

Kiana laughed bitterly, "You've got to be kidding me. You're trying to give me motherly advice when you walked out over 25 years ago?"

Erica shook her head sadly, "You are never going to forgive me for that are you? I've spent the past 10 years trying to make up for not being there for you. I bought you nice things, sent you money and even offered to pay for college, which you turned down. What more do I need to do?"

"You honestly don't get it, do you?" Kiana replied in frustration.

"I came to New York to find my mother not a financial benefactor. I could've forgiven you walking out on us if you had simply admitted how wrong it had been and how sorry you were for doing it. You didn't need to buy my love; it was free for the taking. All you had to do was show me love in return."

"I've never said I didn't love you."

"You never said you did either."

"That's not true."

"Name one moment where you said you loved me or were even proud of me," Kiana challenged.

Erica could only sit there with a look embarrassment on her face.

"Erica, our relationship consisted of summers spent with you criticizing me and trying to change who I was. You weren't there for my first crush, first kiss, high school or college graduation. There was always something more important going on. Even the last summer I came to see you after the incident with Dante all you could say was 'I knew there was something wrong with that boy, he was too perfect'."

"I warned you of that when you first brought him to meet me."

Kiana shook her head sadly, "Erica, the last thing I needed to hear was 'I told you so.' I was physically and emotionally hurting and you couldn't even muster the least bit of sympathy."

Erica started to speak but Kiana held up her hand to halt her.

"We could sit here all night going back and forth this way and not get anywhere. You made it clear on many occasions that you were not the 'motherly type' and I learned to live with it. So these sudden spurts of motherly concern aren't necessary. I've done fine all of these years without it and I'll continue to do fine," Kiana said with a look that told her mother their conversation was over.

Erica stood slowly, "I see."

She looked tired and older than her 44 years. It made Kiana wonder if she'd been too harsh. She stood up, walked around the desk and gave her mother a brief hug.

"I appreciate your concern but I really am fine," she said gently.

A weak smile appeared on Erica's face, "I know. Give your father my best and call me when you get back."

"I will."

Kiana watched her mother's retreating figure curiously. Something was going on with her and they were going to have to talk about it when Kiana returned from Indianapolis. These

sudden displays of motherly concern were causing a strain in their well-maintained relationship. Sighing heavily she pushed the conversation with her mother to the back of her mind for now. Just as she settled down at her desk to finish up some work her phone ringing interrupted her plans. A smile lights her face as she recognizes Sean's number.

"Hey, I was just thinking about you."

"Good thoughts I hope."

"Always. Will we be meeting at my apartment or at Diane and Olivia's?"

"That's what I was calling about. Unfortunately I'm not going to be able to make it. There's an issue I have to take care of here before the holiday."

"I understand," she tried not to sound too disappointed. "Will you be able to drop by later?"

"I don't think so. I have a feeling the meeting will probably run late."

His voice was unusually tense which told Kiana that there was something serious going on.

"Alright, call me if you need a sounding board."

"Thanks, although you may regret making that offer when your phone is ringing at 3:00 a.m."

A soft smile crossed her features, "When it comes to you I have no regrets."

"That's good to hear," he said, a smile in his voice as well. "If I don't get a chance to talk to you tonight I'll call you before your flight in the morning."

"Okay."

"And Kiana."

"Yes?"

"I can't wait to get you in my arms again."

"I can't either. Talk to you in the morning and good luck with your meeting."

"Thanks. Goodnight."

It was close to midnight before Sean finished several meetings. The last of which was with his attorney and accountant. He sat alone in the semi-dark of his office staring

out of the window at nothing in particular with too many thoughts running through his head to focus on anything.

Freedom Records had become his life. It was so much a part of him that to lose it would be like losing a limb. He refused to let that happen. There was another option which his attorney and accountant both agreed would benefit everyone involved but Sean wasn't sure if he was willing to let go of any part of Freedom, no matter how small.

Sean ran his hand across his forehead. His eyes were strained and he felt a headache coming on from staring at numbers for the last hour. Sighing heavily he grabbed his coat and headed out of the office with the intention of going home and getting some sleep. Before he even realizes it he's heading downtown instead of up. He circled Kiana's block several times before deciding to park. There was a moment of regret when he heard her sleepy voice over the intercom but it was soon forgotten at the sight of her looking adorably sexy in a pair of polka dot boxers, white tank top and a short cotton robe with her hair tousled all over head.

"Does that offer for a sounding board still stand?"

Kiana smiled sleepily. "Of course," she stepped aside to let him in.

"Can I get you anything?"

"Yes, this," he pulled her into his arms for a quick, passionate kiss.

Kiana sighed contentedly, "That's a wake up call worth getting up in the middle of the night for."

Sean held her close, "Mmm...you feel good. I needed this."

They stood in the middle of her living room holding each other for a few more moments before Sean sighed and pulled away.

"I could stand here holding you all night but I need to talk to someone not directly involved with Freedom."

"Alright, have a seat and I'll make some of that Chai tea you like."

Sean smiled as he watched Kiana walk into the kitchen. This was why he came to her tonight. She always managed to know just what he needed even when he didn't know he needed it.

Kiana walked out a few moments later with two cups of tea. She handed one to Sean then sat beside him, spreading a throw cover she kept on the sofa across her lap.

"Okay, I'm all ears," she announced once she was comfortably settled.

"As you know Chaos charted at seven on the billboard chart in the first month of his release. Then Candace charted last week just a month after hers."

"Yes. That's excellent for an independent label because it makes the big boys start taking you seriously."

"Yeah, it also gets them thinking about buyouts. One of them approached me earlier this week offering to buy me out of Freedom Records."

"What would that mean for you and your artists?"

"I'd no longer own the label. It would be under their umbrella and Freedom's artists would get more exposure and opportunities being under a larger label."

"What would you do if you took the offer? Would you go back to performing full-time?"

Sean smiled tiredly, "I hadn't gotten that far in the decision-making process."

"How far did you get?"

"I talked to my guys in legal and accounting and they both think it's a great offer. I would make a huge profit, twice as much than I originally invested in Freedom."

"If that's the case, why the hesitation? If it's about the money then there's nothing to consider. Unless it's not the money but the idea of selling your heart and soul for a dollar sign."

Sean gazed at Kiana curiously. "How do you know me so well?"

Kiana grinned and shrugged her shoulders, "It's not a matter of knowing you. I've seen you work. Listened to you talk. You love what you do. You love being personally involved with each and every one of your artists. You love mentoring them and giving them the creative freedom you didn't have. Freedom Records and Sean Leonard are

synonymous. You're one in the same and worth far more than anyone can offer."

Sean put his mug of tea on the coffee table and took Kiana's hand, "Come here."

Kiana moved into the circle of his arms, tilting her face up towards his. Sean kissed her softly, gently and without the urgency their kisses had taken as of late.

"Thank you," he said.

"I didn't do anything but state the obvious."

"Which is exactly what I needed. I've had so many people pitching dollar signs at me from every direction that the obvious was getting lost in translation."

"I'm glad I could help you see it clearly," she said with a yawn.

Sean chuckled, "Come on Sleeping Beauty, let's put you to bed."

Kiana grinned, "Are you tucking me in as well?"

"Woman, what have I told you about playing with fire?"

An expression of mock innocence crossed her face, "It takes the chill away?"

Sean laughed out loud. She was so good for him. When they got to Kiana's bedroom she settled into bed as Sean sat beside her on top of the covers then snuggled against his side. Ever since the night they fell asleep this same way on his sofa it became a habit of theirs whenever Sean stayed late at her apartment. Not wanting to test her celibacy or his patience, he would never spend the night but leave as soon as she fell asleep.

When Sean heard her soft snores he smiled and gently eased her out of his arms. On his way out of the bedroom he noticed a spiral notebook lying on her reading chair with "My Writing" written on the cover. He tried to ignore it but curiosity got the better of him. Quickly glancing back at the bed like a guilty little boy to make sure Kiana was still asleep, he picked up the notebook.

It was filled with poetry. He flipped through the pages, randomly reading several of the poems. They were all very good, telling him so much more about her than he already knew. He wondered why she never mentioned she wrote.

Feeling as if he were invading her privacy he decided to put it back. Just as he was laying it on the chair it flipped open to a poem titled "Play Me."

*I stand alone in a quiet corner of the room
Waiting for you to walk through the door,
Anticipating how long it will be before you notice me,
Before you can't resist coming over
And delicately running your long, supple fingers across my ivory.*

*Play me...
Like Mozart played his symphonies
Like Ray played the blues
Like Stevie made us groove.*

*C'mon,
Play me...
You know you want to.
I see you remembering what it's like
When the tips of your fingers wander over my keys
Playing a melody that vibrates through my entirety
As you close your eyes
Bringing me to a tempo I have never known before.*

*That's it...
Sit before me,
Open the door to my soul with every note you play.
Tune me to be your instrument of passion,
Stroke me with your song of desire,
Caress me with your harmony.*

*Play me...
Play me with your heart and soul,
Guide me through your joy and pain
Let me sing your story in the only language I know,
With a deep soulful melody
Or a soft trickle of notes,*

You may do what you will with me,

Just as long as you...

Play me.

A broad smile spread across Sean's face. He laid the notebook the way he found it and walked back over to the bed. Kneeling down beside it, he softly rubbed his knuckles along Kiana's cheek. Her eyes fluttered open and she smiled sleepily.

"Hey."

"Hey. I just wanted to say goodnight," he told her.

"Goodnight," she said with a yawn before drifting back to sleep.

As he made his way out of her apartment, Sean turned out the lights and made sure the door locked behind him. Walking to his car he couldn't help the smile that spread across his face. Kiana managed to find the chink in his armor that the troubles with Adrienne had encased his heart in and made him realize that he wanted so much more in a relationship than sexual satisfaction. He wanted a friend and companion even more than a lover. Kiana had become that and so much more. He'd come to care very much for her and felt that this weekend with her would be the perfect time to tell her that, hopefully moving their relationship on to the next level.