

# “The Vow”

By Garvey Hemisphere

Wallace rushed towards the bay of elevators, pushing every button available as his forehead shone with perspiration. The anticipation rose inside his stomach as the car slowly crept its way along and the lighted numbers changed from floor to floor. He pressed the talk button on his phone for the sixth time in what seemed like as many seconds, but it continued to go straight to voicemail. He gave one final look over his shoulder as the elevator’s bell dinged and the doors slid open. He took a step to the side to allow a nurse and two men in street clothes off the car before stepping onto the elevator and tapping the L button and jabbing his forefinger into the CLOSE DOOR button a dozen times before the doors slid shut.

He attempted more another set of phone calls from his iPhone, but it was useless – there was still no answer. As the elevator reached the lobby floor, he rushed towards the hospital entrance when he saw her marching through the double doors.

“No, Kamryn!” he yelled. “Absolutely not! You cannot be here. Not today!”

“How dare you try to tell me where I can and cannot be?” Kamryn returned with a snarl. “I am just as entitled to be here as you are!”

“It’s not that simple. You don’t understand anything that’s going on.”

“I understand well enough to know that she’s up there and you don’t want me to see her. Why is that, Wallace? Scared it might ruin that little delusion she has of you? Scared she might see you’re not perfect?”

“Jesus Christ, Kam. How many times are you going to make a fool of yourself before you realize the only person who is constantly concerned with what other people think of them is *you*! For once, realize this has nothing to do with me. She’s just... she’s scared and she doesn’t understand how much is about to change.”

“I don’t care, I’m not leaving here until I see her face! Do you think I’ll stop just because we’re in a hospital? You think I won’t speak my mind just because we’re in public?”

“Kam, I’m very aware that you’re going to speak your mind no matter where you are,” he said with a roll of the eyes. “But I don’t need you going up there and scaring that poor girl.”

“Excuse me?”

He sighed. He knew she wasn’t going to leave until she had seen her face to face and said what she wanted to say. Kam had always been persistent that way.

“Fine, Kamryn...”

“No, don’t do that,” she interrupted with a wave of the finger. “You’re the one at fault here! Don’t be weak and make it seem like you’re doing me some kind of favor by letting me speak to her.”

“I said ‘fine,’ goddamit! What more do you want from me?!”

“Don’t you take that tone-!”

“Okay look... just... just look. I’m sorry, okay? I apologize.” Wallace attempted to calm himself as their volume was causing several looks from people grieving inside the emergency room as well as the various hospital workers. “It’s already been a long day and like I said she’s on edge, I’m on edge. We’re all dealing with this the best way we can. All I’m asking is that you don’t go up there and make things worse. She will explain everything once we’re upstairs. I just don’t know if it’s my place.”

“Not your place? You’re her –”

“I still haven’t pressed this button yet, Kam. Do you want to go up or not? Because if you keep it up...”

She opened her mouth to speak, but reconsidered and cleared her throat before nodding. Wallace gave her a hard look and she readjusted her brown leather purse against her shoulder and straightened the front of her skirt. He gave a pained sigh, pushed the button and the elevator’s bell instantly dinged. They stepped inside and rode the car up to the tenth floor in silence.

Once there, they stepped off and made a left heading out of the bay of elevators, towards the nurses’ station. After a few feet, they made a right, where Kamryn noticed various cousins, nieces and nephews she hadn’t seen in years. They all looked overcome with grief, but also somewhat comforted at the sight of her. All except her aunt Carol who was sobbing alone in a chair just as they made the final left and arrived at room 2223.

“She’s still a bit in shock, Kam. Don’t try to rush her. Just let her tell you what’s going on.”

She nodded her head and readjusted her purse once again before Wallace pushed the door open. He walked in and she followed behind cautiously, her legs suddenly feeling heavier than they had before. The beeps of various machines and the hum of a small television in the corner filled the hospital room as silent expressions of five other family members acknowledged Kamryn’s presence before returning their eyes to the floor. Fighting off the overwhelm, Kam focused her attention on the small, teenage girl laying in the hospital bed with her back turned. She looked even smaller than Kamryn remembered and the hospital gown barely clung to the tops of her shoulders.

“Hey baby,” Kamryn said, her voice cracking under the weight of those words.

“Mommy?” the girl asked weakly, uncertain if she was hearing things. She turned over and met eyes with Kamryn whose face flooded with tears at the sight of seeing her fifteen-year-old daughter, who sobbed uncontrollably and everyone in the room leapt to their feet on instinct. Wallace waved them off and allowed Kamryn the chance to console her.

Unclear of what to do, Kamryn’s eyes met Wallace’s as he mouthed instructions to embrace her. Finally, the light bulb went off and she wrapped her arms around the young girl’s shoulders. For several moments, the two whimpered together and hugged as the others in the room emptied out except for Wallace, who planted himself in a chair in the corner.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here for you, babygirl. I’m sorry that... that I’ve been gone,” she said.

“It’s okay. It’s...”

“I know, baby. I know. Just tell me what happened.”

“It all happened so fast. I saw her though, Mama. I saw her face even I told them I didn’t want to. I told them a thousand times. But as soon as I saw her, I didn’t want to let her go. They told me I had to... but I just couldn’t. It’s not fair, Mommy. I already loved her and they won’t let me see her or hold her or anything. They won’t even tell me if she’s okay. She’s already...” The girl’s thoughts trailed off and she began to sob again.

Kamryn rubbed her shoulders and held her hand as Wallace moved his chair closer.

“Tell me, babygirl. Tell me what’s going on.”

“She’s already gone.”

“Gone?”

“She’s not mine. Not anymore. I’ll never get to see her again.”

The room grew quiet again, when Kamryn suddenly stood up from her seat and rushed towards the door. The air seemed more viscous and it became hard for her to move and harder for her to breathe. She dropped her purse before swinging the door open and walking towards a large window at the end of the hall. She reached the window, but still struggled to catch her breath when Wallace's hand ran across her back. Seeing the greying beard forming along his jawline and the sincerity in his eyes made her break down again as she felt the guilt rush over her. Wallace had done everything he could, but she could tell the weight of it all was beginning to engulf him.

"I'm sorry."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me that so I'd be prepared? Why didn't you tell me so that I could *help*?!"

"Because we're not just things you pick up and dust off whenever you're ready to play with them. I can't just brief you about everything like they do for you at work! I'm not your fucking assistant! Your daughter... she's in there hurting because she's fifteen, some people she's never met just took her baby away and she doesn't know why!"

"And what am I supposed to do about that? I can't help that The Program took her child. That's exactly what The Program is for!"

"So, you're just going to let her fester here in all this mental anguish and do nothing to about it? I thought you said you wanted to help her? Isn't that what we should do? Isn't that what we should have done with Abraham?"

A white-hot flash flared inside Kamryn's chest at the mention of Abraham's name and she let out a deep sigh. She cleared her throat and wiped the tears from her eyes. She straightened the front of her skirt once again and walked back towards the hospital room. Her daughter laid there quietly, trying her best to ignore the evening news flickering across the small black-and-white.

She cleared her throat and looked her daughter square in the eye. "You're telling me you took one look at that baby and fell in love with her? Just like that?"

"Yes, it's hard to describe it. I made peace with everything from Day One – I knew what was going to happen. But as soon as I saw her, I didn't want to let her go. It felt like part of my soul was being ripped from inside of me."

Kamryn walked to the side table and poured water from the hospital's carafe into a paper cup of water. She took a few slow sips and checked the time on her watch, before crushing the cup between her hands and tossing it into the waste basket before returning to her daughter's side.

"Listen to me. We're going to get your baby back. But we've gotta move and we've gotta move right now. Wallace, round up the family out there because we're going to need them. We've got a lot of ground to cover."

"Ground to cover? What are you talking about? She can't move. She just gave birth!"

"She's not going anywhere – we are."

"What?"

"Just go out there and get everyone ready. We have to go."

"Go? Go where?"

Kamryn grabbed her purse from the floor and returned the contents to the inside. She checked her watch again and cleared her throat for the final time.

"To North Carolina. If we don't, she's going to lose her baby forever."

“North Carolina? No. Absolutely not. That’s not what I meant when I said helping her. We almost died the last time we were there and we spent all we had just to get away from there.”

“Wallace, look at her. Putting our daughter back together again isn’t worth dying over?”

Wallace looked at his daughter’s face and sighed, but relented. He knew Kamryn was right.

“So, what’s the move?” he asked with a focused look in his eye.

“We need to call Daddy first and let him know we’re on the way. Then, we drive all night and don’t stop until we reach his compound. Go rally the family. They’re coming with us.”

“We’re just going to leave her by herself? She can’t go anywhere for the next 72 hours.”

“She’ll be fine. I’ll call Grandma and she can take care of her until we get back. Now go!”

Wallace exited the room without debate, leaving Kamryn and her daughter to speak.

“Baby, listen to me. It’s been a long three years, but I’m here now and I’m never going to abandon you again. I’m sorry for everything that’s happened in the past, but I want to make amends. Your father and I have to go to North Carolina for a few days to get your baby back.”

“Kamaye.”

“What?”

“Her name is Kamaye.”

A smile crept across Cheryl’s face. “We’re going to get Kamaye and we’re going to put her right in your arms, okay? I promise.”

“Mommy?”

“Yes, baby?”

“Can you sing the song? From when I fell and hurt my knee and had to get stitches? Just one time?”

“I’ll sing it as soon as I get back. Get your rest, okay? Grandma will be here soon.” She placed a soft kiss on her forehead and walked towards the door. She pulled her iPhone from her purse and looked down the list of contacts until she saw ‘Daddy’ flash across the screen. She hit the call button and she saw that Wallace had gathered each family member and they were waiting on her at the end of the hall. Finally, the line stopped tilling and a gruff voice answered the phone. “Daddy,” she said sternly. “Daddy, it’s me. I’m on the way and I have a few people with me. There’s about twelve of us. I already know what you’re about to say, but we don’t have time. We’re going to make that motherfucker *pay*. Do you hear me? Gather everything. Peace time is over.”

She hit the end button and joined the rest of the family at the end of the hallway, embracing Wallace in a tight hug.

“It’s good to be home,” she said, before leading them back towards the bay of elevators.