

The film retrospective ended and the lights came back on. People were on their feet applauding and chanting Vivi! Vivi! Vivi! I looked toward the front of the auditorium expecting to see Vivianne smiling and waving like a beauty queen. But she was nowhere to be seen. Then a loud piercing fire alarm sounded and cut through the cheering and clapping like a knife. I didn't see or smell any smoke. Was this a joke? Everyone was looking confused and I heard a chorus of groans and cursing as we were instructed to quickly leave the auditorium by an annoyed looking member of the film festival committee. As I was guiding Mama through the jostling crowd, I happened to turn and look down the long hallway that led to the basement dressing rooms used by performers. I saw Allegra run up the basement steps looking dazed and terrified. I called out to her but in the loud commotion she didn't hear me and I watched as she turned and rushed out a nearby exit. Once outside, I looked around for her and spotted her rental car tearing out of the parking lot.

I did not have a good feeling about this. Since Allegra had come from the direction of the dressing rooms, then she must have been trying to see Vivianne, again. And Harriet Randall must have called the police, again. At least that was the only excuse I could come up with for my sister looking so scared. I was relieved that Mama hadn't seen her but I noticed she was still scanning the crowd looking for her.

"I wonder how much longer we're going to have to wait to get back in?" Asked Mama, after we'd been waiting in the parking lot for fifteen minutes.

Most of the other attendees were also still waiting but many people had left in huff. I really wanted to leave myself to find out what was up with Allegra but Mama, being a movie buff and proud of Vivianne DeArmond's connection to Willow, wouldn't

hear of it. The fire department had arrived five minutes before and we were waiting for the all clear, when a nervous looking male film festival committee member addressed the restless crowd.

“Um, excuse me ladies and gentlemen,” began the man in a gruff voice, looking like he might throw up. What in the world was going on?

“Due to an unfortunate circumstance, the award ceremony has been cancelled. We’re going to have to ask that you all leave the premises at once,” the man said, wiping sweat from his bald head with a handkerchief.

After a minute of stunned silence, everyone started talking at once. The committee member had a crowd of angry people surrounding him that he was unsuccessfully trying to placate.

“I came all the way from Pittsburg for this,” exclaimed one angry woman pointing a chubby finger at the man’s chest.

“I took off from work to be here today,” said a handsome older black man wearing a T-shirt that read: VIVA VIVI! But the committee member remained mum as to why the ceremony had been cancelled.

Some people, not needing to be told twice, jumped in their cars and took off. I noticed one of them was the nerdy-looking man who’d tried to hug Vivianne during the autograph signing. He looked around nervously before hopping in a beat-up white VW Van and taking off. I’d heard about many instances of Vivianne’s diva behavior, including holding up production on a movie set for hours after getting a paper cut while going over her script, and wondered if she was up to her old tricks again. I prayed that’s all it was.

“Oh, come on, Kendra. Take me home. I don’t have time for this mess. I’ve got stuff I could be doing.” I silently followed her to my car unable to shake the uneasy feeling that something was terribly wrong and wondering what my sister had to do with it.

This feeling intensified as Mama and I were pulling out of the auditorium’s parking lot and a couple of police cars and an ambulance arrived.

“I wonder what happened?” asked Mama, looking back. I didn’t reply. My mouth was suddenly very dry.

When I pulled up into Mama driveway, Allegra’s rented black Camry was parked with the front bumper scraping the closed garage door. Mama hopped out and inspected the damage to her garage door. Besides the scrape in the paint, the aluminum door was dented, and looked to have been knocked off track. I could tell she was highly pissed.

“I bet that silly girl wasn’t even paying attention! Always looking at herself in the mirror. And she *will* be paying to get my garage door fixed! You can bank on that.” I followed Mama through the side gate into the backyard where we could hear someone crying hysterically. It was Allegra. She was sitting on the porch step sobbing. When she spotted Mama, she flew off the porch straight into her arms.

“Allie? Baby what’s wrong?” she said, patting Allegra’s back and giving me a bewildered look. We both knew this couldn’t be about a broken garage door. Allegra usually tries to sweet talk her way out of any wrong doing she’s guilty of. She tried to talk but we couldn’t understand a word she was saying through her hiccupping sobs.

Mama tossed me her house keys. “Go get her some water.” I went to do as I was told and took a big gulp of cold water myself before going back outside. I was almost too afraid to know what was wrong.

After taking a few sips of the water, Allegra finally calmed down enough to talk.

“It was so horrible, Mama,” she said shaking her head at the memory. “Vivianne DeArmond. She’s. . .she’s —” she started to sob again. Mama had had enough and grabbed her by the shoulders giving her a good shake.

Allegra twisted free of her grasp and blurted out, “She’s dead, okay! Somebody killed her!”

Mama gasped and stared at me.

“Come on. We need to go inside,” I said, ushering my still crying sister and my shocked grandmother into the house.