

### #HotAndHandy bonus scene

Vincent started the coffee maker and returned to the bedroom. His wife, Hilary, was still asleep, her curly gray hair the only thing visible. His wife. Even after a year, he still got a thrill from thinking about it.

He bent over and peeled back the duvet just enough to plant a kiss on her nose. “Hey, Hon.”

She grunted.

“Coffee’s on, and I’m taking off. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” she mumbled.

He tiptoed out of the room, grabbed a coffee, and left.

Iris, his landlady, employer, and mother’s best friend, was at the bottom of the stairs. “Morning, sweetheart,” she said. “Where are you off to at this hour?”

Most of Keeney was still sleeping at seven a.m. on a Saturday morning. He would be, too, if he hadn’t agreed to make a small repair for his mother.

“Mom’s house. She’s gonna feed me breakfast in exchange for fixing her kitchen light.”

“Today?” Iris’s eyes bugged out.

“Well, we said Sunday, but I’m gonna do it this morning instead.” He stepped around her and headed to his truck. “Enjoy your day.”

“But—”

“Bye, Iris.” She’d talk his ear off if he lingered, and he wanted to get the job done and get back to crawl into bed with Hilary.

Opening the back door to his mom’s house, Vincent wiped his feet and hung up his jacket. “Something smells go—”

Ali Haddad was sitting at his mom’s kitchen table, bare-chested, coffee raised to his lips.

“Hey,” Ali said.

“Hey,” Vincent replied, looking everywhere except at his boss’s gray-hair-covered chest. “I’m here to fix the...” He pointed at the light fixture above the sink. It was no longer flickering.

Ali followed his gaze. “I fixed that yesterday. Want some coffee?” He made to rise, but Vincent waved him off, not wanting to see any more of Ali’s uncovered body parts.

“I’ll get it,” he said, turning his back on Ali to find a mug. Marcia Ortiz had been single for over twenty years, and Vincent realized that Ali had been a fixture in their lives for about that long. Was his presence at the breakfast table—shirtless FFS!—a regular occurrence?

It really wasn’t any of Vincent’s business. His mother was a competent, grown-ass woman perfectly capable of looking after herself. But still...

“Oh, good. You made coffee.” His mom entered the kitchen wearing something flimsier and frothier than the fuzzy bathrobe he was used to seeing her in. She kissed the top of Ali’s bald head before smiling up at Vincent.

“Hi, sweetheart. I thought you were coming tomorrow.” She floated over, pulled him down to kiss his cheek, and nabbed the mug out of his hand. “Thanks.” She winked. “Want to stay for breakfast?”

“No, I’ll just, umm,” he gestured toward the door, “see you later,” he muttered and beat a hasty retreat.

Sitting in his truck, he stared at his mom’s house and noticed little things: the grass was freshly mown, a tree had been cut back, and three large baskets of geraniums hung from the eaves. Things Vincent hadn’t done and things his mother wouldn’t have done. There was a sputtering noise, then arcs of water erupted from the corners of the lawn. The bastard had installed a sprinkler system!

Ali exited the house—thankfully fully dressed—and approached the truck.

Climbing out, Vincent accepted a mug of coffee from Ali and gestured at the sprinklers. “Did you do this?”

“Hell, no. I supervised while Carl did it. But I did fix the kitchen light.”

Vincent grunted. Appreciative, yet annoyed at the same time. Looking after things was one of the few ways he could pay his mother back for her unfailing support when he’d gone to prison.

As if reading his thoughts, Ali said, “I’m not replacing you. Just supporting her any way she’ll let me. Which is hard, considering how independent she is and how looking after others is her love language.”

“True,” Vincent replied. “It’s just...” Other than Hilary, he’d never said the words out loud. But Ali was so much more than his supervisor and the guy who apparently was sleeping with his mother. “She gave up so much for me. Every week she made that shitty-ass trip to Forks and never complained. Always looking like she was out for a Sunday drive, and it was no bother at all.”

“That’s because I drove her.”

“You did?” Vincent goggled at him.

Ali rested a hip against the truck, saying, “She made the first trip by herself and was a wreck. So I found out when she’d planned her next trip and was here waiting for her.”

“Huh. And you just waited in the car? You could have come in with her.”

“Nope.” Ali shook his head. “You two needed privacy and I got in a nap.”

The front door opened, and Vincent’s mother called out, “Breakfast is ready, you two.” She said it like calling them in for a meal was an everyday thing.

“There isn’t much I wouldn’t do for her.” Ali pushed off from the truck and looked at Vincent. “Or for you.”

Ali walked up to Vincent’s mother, said something that made her smile, then put his arm around her as they entered the house.

Vincent followed, warmed all the way through by the sight of them together.