

## Chapter 11

[Vivienne]

The moment the giant black gates of the Richardson estate come into view, my eyes start stinging with tears. My heart rate picks up, and my palms get all sweaty. After a long, long time, I am finally returning home, and truth be told, I don't know how it's going to go.

Elijah gives me a smile and pulls over in the driveway.

The moment I step out of the car, I am instantly greeted by Fido, my dad's service dog. The five-year-old German Shepherd almost jumps over me, his paws reaching my shoulders. He barks and wags his tail, too happy to see me.

My eyes burn from the impending tears, because I have only taken one step towards my home, and everything is already overwhelming.

I pet him for a few seconds before he suddenly pulls me towards the house, knowing full well that I belong here.

"Fido," Elijah scolds him and tries to pull me away, but I stop him.

"It's okay. Let him."

We walk towards the front door, where we are greeted by Mrs. Williams, the housekeeper. Her face lights up the moment she sees me, and her expression changes in an instant.

"Vivienne!" she cries, pulling me into a warm hug. "It's so good to see you. Oh God, look at you. How weak you've become. Have you been eating properly?"



She keeps fussing over me, and I let her. I missed her so much.

"Mrs. Williams, how have you been?" I ask, taking a good look at her. She hasn't changed a bit, except for a few gray hairs.

"Good. But now that you're back, I hope I'll be okay. Come in, come in. Mr. and Mrs. Richardson are waiting for you in the drawing room."

The mention of my parents makes my heart beat faster.

Elijah must have noticed because he puts a hand on my shoulder, encouraging me. "Come on, don't be a stranger now. This is your home."

I nod, taking a deep breath to calm myself.

With Fido right by my side, I walk inside the house that I grew up in. It's as big as I remember, with its high ceilings, expensive chandeliers, marble flooring, and polished interiors. The entrance hall is wide enough to fit two cars, and the staircase leading to the upper floor has a red carpet laid out over it.

Everything looks so familiar, yet so different.

I walk past the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, and then the drawing room. My throat constricts the moment I see my parents sitting on the couch. They have aged. My mom has lost some weight, and my dad... he doesn't look healthy. There are dark circles under his eyes, and his cheeks look hollow. His skin seems pale and dry.

My heart lurches painfully.

The moment my mom notices me, she gets to her feet. My dad

follows suit, his wheelchair creaking as he moves.

I take a step forward, and then another, until I'm standing right in front of them.

"Mom... dad."

My mom bursts into tears and reaches out to me, her hands shaking. I fall into her arms and allow her to hold me. I don't care that she is sobbing so loudly and repeating the same words over and over again.

"My baby. Oh God, my little girl. You came back. Finally. You came back."

I don't know when my dad joins us. All I know is that I'm crying my heart out and feeling so emotional that I'm barely able to breathe.

It takes a while for us to calm down.

"Let me look at you," my dad says, cupping my face. He studies me, frowning. "You have lost so much weight."

I laugh, wiping my tears away. "I could say the same about you."

After we all settle down, I head to my room to freshen up. Mom knocks on my door, even though it's already open. I turn to find her standing in the doorway, her whole face glowing with genuine happiness.

"I know you might want to rest, but I just wanted to see you again. It feels like forever, doesn't it? I still hate the day we fought over that silly thing, and you walked out because you thought we didn't understand you."



"Mom," I say, feeling terrible for making them feel that way. I regret everything now—my actions, my words, and the last three years spent without them.

I hold her hand and make her sit on the bed. I sit next to her. "I'm so sorry for everything. I don't know what I was thinking. I'm such a terrible daughter. I'm so sorry for hurting you like this."

"Hey," Mom says, wiping the tears that roll down my face and kissing my forehead. "You have nothing to apologize for. Nothing at all. Besides, it wasn't the first time you ran away like that. Remember when you were twelve, and you ran away because I refused to let you go out with your friends? Or when you were fifteen and locked yourself in your room for days because we grounded you for breaking curfew?" She laughs, reminiscing about those memories. "You have always been a rebellious child, and no matter how much we tried, you always managed to do whatever you wanted. And that is one of the many reasons why we love you so much."

"Why do I find that so hard to believe?"

She tucks some loose hair behind my ear, cupping my face. "Vivienne, my beautiful baby, you always believed in yourself so much that you never needed anyone else's approval. And that is such a wonderful quality. Your father and I have always admired that in you. We still do. So, don't ever doubt yourself. No matter what happens, you will always be our baby, and we will always support you."

Her words remind me of how much I changed myself for Caden. I always sought his approval for almost everything. I waited for him, anticipated his reaction to my decisions, and did whatever he wanted me to do.

And look where that brought me.

I nod, swallowing the lump in my throat. "Thank you, Mom."

We hug for a little while longer before she finally pulls away and stands up, smiling. "Alright. You go get refreshed while I make your favourite dinner. We can catch up later." She is almost at the door when she suddenly remembers something. "Oh, and when you're done, meet your dad in the study. He said he wanted to talk to you about something. It's important."



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