

## Chapter 9 I Won't Leave Him

Eileen paused at the doorway of the hospital room, her eyes tracking the cluster of people huddled around Vivian's bed. She caught a glimpse of Vivian, who clung to Bryan with a determination that spoke volumes.

The Warren family stood with their backs to her, their displeasure a heavy cloak in the room's already charged air.

Fergus Warren, Vivian's father, broke the silence with his deep voice. "Our family's name is at stake. We've adored Vivian from her first breath. Yet now, she's unfairly portrayed by the press. Bryan, we're owed an explanation."

Bryan stood still, his expression unreadable.

Debby Warren, burning with anger, stepped in. She tugged at Vivian's hand, pulling it away from Bryan. "Divorce your wife first. Then you can return to Vivian," she said to Bryan.

"Mom!" Vivian's voice cracked as she reclaimed Bryan's hand, her body leaning into his. "Please, don't corner Bryan. It's not his choice. The marriage was his grandmother's doing. Without her permission, how can he get a divorce?"

Fergus's eyes bore into Vivian, his frustration palpable. "Forget the divorce for now. He must quell these rumors. He should at least protect your name from being tarnished any further."

Vivian, undeterred, wrapped herself around Bryan tighter. "I chose this. If I hadn't walked away then, none of this would have happened. The blame is mine to bear, not his. I won't leave his side this time."

Fergus and Debby seemed poised to counter, but Vivian turned to Kian, who had yet to speak, signaling for his support.

Kian broke the silence. "Mom, Dad, Vivian is an adult. She should make her own decisions. We ought not to interfere. Besides, she's correct. Her

departure from Bryan led us here. It was her choice. Don't worry; I've dealt with the media. Everyone knows Bryan's marriage wasn't for love. The journalists seek only scandal. Vivian won't be the subject of ridicule."

Eileen's grip on the door handle tightened. She knew too well the media's appetite for scandal. With the Warren family's intervention, the storm would surely pass.

In their circle, mockery was reserved not for Vivian but for the elusive Mrs. Dawson, clinging to her title as Bryan's wife.

Once her identity was exposed in the future, it would turn her into a jest in the circle.

"I'll manage my personal matters. Don't worry, Mr. and Mrs. Warren." Bryan's voice, firm yet devoid of warmth, cut through the room.

He released Vivian's hand from his and, looking down, whispered, "Rest well. Venture out with more bodyguards. It's best we part for some days."

Vivian's face fell, her urge to embrace him cooled by his indifferent gaze. She timidly grasped his pinkie, her voice cautious. "Bryan, will you visit me here?"

"If time allows, I will," Bryan answered, then nodded to Fergus and Debby. "If you'll excuse me, I have to go now."

Eileen stepped aside, giving space for Bryan's exit. As he passed, he furrowed his brow slightly.

Fergus's and Debby's voices of displeasure could be heard from the room.

"What's with his attitude? It's like he doesn't even care about Vivian!"

"Vivian, show some restraint. You've gone to lengths for him, yet he meets your warmth with coldness..."

The closing of the door muffled their further words. Though Eileen caught no more, the discontent in Fergus's and Debby's tones was unmistakable. They clearly placed the blame on Bryan for Vivian's current plight. Her image was tarnished, and now, she was injured. Their frustration with Bryan was palpable, viewing him as the root of Vivian's woes.

Eileen looked up at Bryan just as he took the prescription slip from her hand. Bryan studied it closely before asking, "Have you collected all the medicine?"

Eileen responded, "Not yet. Should I try to talk to the media?"

"Get the medicine. I'll wait for you in the car," Bryan said as he gave the prescription back to her and left. His response suggested that dealing with the media was not necessary at the moment.

Eileen cast another look towards the ward where Vivian argued with her parents.

She decided to follow Bryan, intrigued by his thoughts but unable to decipher them. Except when he was in bed, Bryan's actions and motives remained as elusive as ever.

Upon returning to the car with the medicine, Eileen found Bryan in the back seat, engrossed in work on his laptop. He seemed to prioritize his work over addressing the situation with Vivian or the media.

The Apex Group was in the midst of launching its largest project in years, a venture crucial to its international presence.

Bryan was truly busy with his work. That morning alone, Eileen had delivered documents for his signature twice, in addition to bringing him his lunch.

"Mr. Dawson, you have an international conference at 2 p.m. and an evening dinner event," she informed him, suggesting a brief rest after lunch in anticipation of the long evening ahead.

Bryan had managed only two hours of sleep the previous night.

Looking up, he remarked, "If you can handle your tasks, why shouldn't I be able to handle mine?"

Eileen offered a strained smile in return. Her own lack of sleep had left her feeling far from her best.

"Then I'll leave you to your lunch," she said before leaving.

Exiting the company around lunchtime, she encountered Judie and

several other employees.

Judie released the arm of the person beside her and hurried over to Eileen, taking her by the hand. "What luck running into you here! Join me for lunch; it's my birthday. My treat."

The other employees quickly surrounded them, their flattery directed at Eileen due to her position.

"Miss Curtis, join us. It would also be a great chance for us to learn about the upcoming company outing."

"We're not trying to use you. We're simply hoping you might share a bit of inside info!"

Their conversation buzzed around Eileen, and with Judie's insistence, Eileen found herself agreeing to join them at a nearby restaurant.

Once seated, the conversation invariably turned towards Eileen. Compliments on her style were interspersed with attempts to glean insights into matters about Bryan.

"Miss Curtis, could you shed some light on Mr. Dawson's situation with Miss Warren?"

"Why hasn't Mr. Dawson divorced his wife to marry Miss Warren if there's mutual affection?"

"People label Miss Warren unfavorably, unaware that Mr. Dawson's marriage lacked love from the start. It's unfair."

Judie sat next to Eileen. She studied Eileen's expression before saying, "We're too near the office for such talk. It could complicate things for Eileen."

This prompted a hasty retreat into silence from the group, accompanied by awkward glances towards Eileen.

Eileen, meeting Judie's gaze, offered a smile. "That's a matter for Mr. Dawson to address. I don't have the details."

Judie hurried through her meal and settled the bill, not missing the chance to underline her closeness with Eileen to the others. This wasn't

new to Eileen, who had grown accustomed to Judie's antics.

Back at the company, the receptionist greeted Eileen and said, "Miss Curtis, there's a package for you."

Eileen stopped, turned, and approached the reception desk, a crease forming between her brows as she received the package. She was certain she hadn't made any online purchases recently.

"The courier mentioned this was meant for Springvale Lane initially, but since nobody was home, it got redirected here," the receptionist explained.

This struck Eileen as odd. She never used her home address for package deliveries. Moreover, a redirection typically required prior notification.

"Miss Curtis, do you live in Springvale Lane?"

"That area is so close to our office, and even the least expensive home there is worth millions," someone remarked.

Judie's colleagues reacted with astonishment, their eyes wide as they looked at Eileen.

As Bryan's executive assistant, Eileen had a substantial salary, yet affording a place in Springvale Lane implied saving every penny of her income for years, assuming no expenditures on her part.

Given her tenure of just three years at the company and considering what was commonly known about her and Judie's modest backgrounds, the notion of Eileen living in such a prestigious area raised eyebrows.

Eileen seemed to piece something together in her mind. She glanced at Judie, who appeared unaffected by the scrutiny and speculation.

"You seem out of sorts. Why not take a moment to rest upstairs? You'll need to go back to work soon," Judie suggested, her tone laced with concern.

Eileen's lips twisted into a smile as she approached Judie, thrusting the package into Judie's hands. She then gave Judie's shoulder a reassuring pat. "Take this as a present."

"What?" Judie's eyes widened in confusion. "Isn't this a bit much?"

"How so? It's your birthday, isn't it? Think of it as a birthday gift. After all, we're family," Eileen said, her eyebrow arched, her gaze piercing as she looked at Judie.

She was aware that any trouble coming her way would also impact Judie, yet here Judie was, engaging in petty schemes right before her eyes.

She gripped Judie's shoulder firmly, her gaze unflinching as she observed Judie's discomfort. After releasing her grip, Eileen made her way to the stairs.

As she departed, the crowd turned their attention to Judie, eager to delve into the topic of Eileen's luxurious home.

"Exactly how much does Miss Curtis earn a year? Is Mr. Dawson paying her such a high salary?"

"I recall you mentioning her salary being around five or six hundred thousand a year. Were you misleading us?"

As Eileen stepped into the elevator, Judie caught a final glimpse of her retreating figure. The closing doors obscured Eileen's detached expression, leaving Judie with a pang of guilt.

The thought of any misfortune befalling Eileen weighed heavily on her; such an outcome would undoubtedly mean her exit from the company.

But Judie had intended only to unsettle Eileen slightly, not to cause her real harm.

She felt confident in her leverage over Eileen, dismissing any potential concerns.

"Why would I deceive you? Her annual salary is around five to six hundred thousand. When you add bonuses and performance incentives, it barely reaches seven or eight hundred thousand," Judie said.

"So how is it possible for her to own a place in Springvale Lane? And didn't you say she's covering her step-sister's college expenses? There's also the matter of her stepmother's medical bills, isn't that correct?" one of Judie's colleagues asked.