

Ready to Rule: The Real Heiress Strikes Back

Chapter 14

Lucinda lifted her eyebrows, a playful smile tugging at her lips. "Of course. I've missed Mom, Dad, and Grandpa so much while I've been away. Let's hurry inside."

The moment she stepped through the front gate, something felt off. Usually the house buzzed with servants and security guards moving around. Today, the place seemed oddly quiet.

"Sweetheart, over here!"

Kylie's voice called out, pulling Lucinda's attention away from the main house. She stopped in her tracks and glanced toward the back garden. The sight made her grin from ear to ear.

"Grace, look at all those roses and balloons. Mom and Dad must have known I was coming home today. They planned a surprise for me," Lucinda said, her excitement bubbling over.

Grace's smile was just as bright. "They really do spoil you, Miss Lucinda. This is such a huge surprise. Let's go check it out."

Lucinda nodded eagerly and was about to dash off toward the garden when a surprised voice echoed from the main house.

"Lucinda? Weren't you supposed to come back in a couple of days?"

She looked up to see her grandfather stepping out of the doorway. Lucinda didn't hesitate. "Grandpa, I wanted to surprise you. I wasn't expecting all this. Looks like you ended up surprising me instead. I'm going to the garden for a quick look."

Mr. Norwood called her back before she could run off. "Lucinda, come talk to me for a minute. Tell me about your trip. Did you have a good time overseas?"

Lucinda paused, eyeing him with a little smirk. "Are Mom and Dad not ready yet? Did they ask you to keep me busy for a bit?"

Mr. Norwood watched his granddaughter and let out a quiet sigh. She looked so happy and beautiful, her smile lighting up the room. He knew the truth. This surprise wasn't for her. It was for Lydia, who had just come back. He hadn't agreed with the idea—he worried Lucinda would be hurt if she found out. His son and daughter-in-law promised she

wouldn't be home yet, but here she was, standing right in the middle of it all. If she found out the truth, her heart would break.

"Come here, Lucinda," he said gently, his voice warm and a little heavy.

Lucinda blinked her bright eyes and walked over without hesitation. She figured Mom and Dad just needed more time, so she could wait a little longer.

When she got to him, her grandfather reached for her hand and led her inside. "Lucinda, I missed you so much while you were gone."

Lucinda's face lit up even more as she wrapped her arms around his. "I missed you too, Grandpa. That's why I came back early."

Her words made Mr. Norwood's heart ache. He looked at her with a thoughtful expression. "Lucinda, always remember, no matter what happens, you'll always be my precious girl."

Lucinda barely registered his words. She'd heard them her whole life. Her attention drifted to the big windows overlooking the garden, and her eyes landed on a massive heart made of her favorite pink roses. There was a sign that read: Welcome Home, Baby Girl.

Lucinda's smile grew even prouder. She knew it. This had to be the surprise her parents planned just for her.