

Ready to Rule: The Real Heiress Strikes Back

Chapter 18

No. She wasn't going back. She was staying right here, with the Norwood family.

"Mom, Dad, this is all just... so sudden," she said, her voice wavering a little. "Can you give me a bit of time to process everything? But... I'm still glad my sister is home."

She turned to Lydia and offered her hand with a smile. "Welcome to the family, Lydia. If you need help settling in or if anything feels strange, just let me know."

Lucinda's words made it clear she saw herself as part of the family, as if she'd always belonged.

Lydia didn't like fake politeness. She didn't take the hand, just nodded with a cool, "I'm fine, thanks."

Lucinda bit the inside of her cheek and let her hand fall, then glanced at Cameron and Kylie, looking a little hurt. "I'll go to my room now. I'll leave you to it."

She turned away, her shoulders slumped, and disappeared down the hall. Cameron and Kylie watched her go, feeling a heavy ache in their hearts. Lucinda had always been their little treasure, their only daughter. Now, Lydia was suddenly back, and it was no wonder she felt out of place. They'd have to give her some time to get used to it.

Lucinda wandered back to the main house, her mind spinning, and looked up to see her grandfather waiting for her, his face full of worry.

"Lucinda, it's okay. I will always be here for you."

The words broke what little strength she had left. She rushed into his arms and finally let herself cry. "Grandpa, you won't leave me, right?"

Her grandfather hugged her close, rubbing her back in comfort. "Of course not. You'll always be our family's sweetest little princess."

Lucinda sobbed, her words coming out between shaky breaths. "I used to be... but now..."

She could feel her parents drifting toward Lydia, handing her all sorts of special things Lucinda had never even seen before. What stung most was the crown. It was supposed to

be hers, her wedding gift, something her parents had promised her for years. Today, they'd just given it to Lydia, not even asking her first.

Why? Just because Lydia was their real daughter? She'd barely arrived and already taken so much away.

Seeing Lucinda so miserable made her grandfather even more protective. His words came out quickly, almost without thinking. "You'll always have your place here. Even if Lydia is back, she can never take what's yours. No one can."

After being comforted by her grandfather, Lucinda finally made her way upstairs. As soon as she reached the second floor, she noticed things were different. The two rooms that had always been meant for her older brothers' future wives were now joined into one huge, luxurious suite. Every detail was perfect, almost too fancy to believe.

A maid was inside, tidying up. As soon as she saw Lucinda, she quickly bowed her head. "Miss."

Lucinda paused, the title settling like a weight on her shoulders. She understood now why the guards at the door had only called her "Miss." It was because of Lydia. She tightened her fists, but managed a calm smile. "Weren't these rooms supposed to be for my brothers' future wives? Why do they look like this now?"

There were plenty of empty rooms in the house, but these two were the best in the whole place.

The maid kept her gaze down and answered softly. "That was the original plan, but now that Miss Norwood is back, Mr. And Mrs. Norwood combined them for her new bedroom."

The maid could sense the tension in the room. She seemed nervous, probably worried about saying the wrong thing. Everyone knew Lucinda had always been the family's darling. But now that the real daughter was home, everything had changed, and Lucinda's place in the family felt more uncertain than ever.