

## Chapter 157 : Back Home

It was already dark when I came back home. I parked the van in front of our house, killed the engine and stepped out. I crossed our yard, unlocked the door and entered the familiar place. My and Christopher's home. "Christopher...? Christopher...?" I called. No answer. Odd but not uncommon. I looked around the ground floor for Christopher. When there was clearly no sight of him, I walked up the stairs, the steps creaking under my weight.

When I arrived upstairs, I checked his room but didn't see him there. Instead, I found him in my room, curled up on my bed not moving an inch. I frowned, wondering what the hell he was doing as I entered the room. "Christopher, what the hell are you doing?" I asked but I didn't get any response from him. No acknowledgement of my presence, not even a grunt or a groan. Just silence. I approached him, the wrinkles on my forehead deepening as I wondered what had gotten into him. "What the fuck are you...? That's my cupboard, Christopher. Those are..." When I squinted my eyes, I realized that I could see Judy's letters in the drawer. My eyes widened in, perhaps, horror but I wasn't really sure of what I was feeling at that moment.... Maybe dread. All I could think of was that the cursed drawer was not where it was supposed to be and that my son was next to it. An association that I didn't want to deal with until years later.. "Oh shit... Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit."

The curse was the only word I had in mind when I fully registered the situation. Christopher had actually found the letters. The bloody letters. From his mother. The same mother who supposedly died from a heart attack two years ago. Well at least, it was what I told him. But now... I didn't know what to do, frozen in place at the discovery that my son may have learned the truth. Then, after collecting myself, I put my right hand on his shoulder to move him on his side so I could more properly see him. I was expecting him to slap my hand away like he always did, but he didn't even move a single finger, letting me move him without a fight. That was then I noticed that Christopher has vomitted all over himself. He had dirtied his shirt, arms and face, along with my sheets as I could see. "Oh, Christ." I stayed silent. I was thinking. Thinking of what to say to him. I looked at Christopher's dirty face, thinking that maybe I would find a beginning of an answer on his face, on my son's face. He looked like a ghost, dirty with vomit, white as snow and obviously sick. My heart sank at such sight. "I'm sorry, Christopher. I'm so, so sorry." I could only bring myself to apologize to him. My eyes drifted towards the drawer full of letters. I could see that a few of them were out of their envelopes, meaning that Christopher had opened them and read the content. "You read the letters." I stated the obvious, considering the

drawer full of Judy's letters next to him. I could feel my heart in my throat, slowly suffocating me. The weight of the situation really dawned on me at that moment. The sting in my eyes made me aware that I was crying. The tears ran down my cheeks, gathering at my chin before falling on the sheets. I tried to calm down, trying to hold back any hiccup as I tried to speak, wiping my tears away with my sleeve. "I did it for your good, Christopher. Honestly I did. I never meant to lie. I just thought... I just thought it was better if you didn't know... that... that... I didn't mean to... I was going to show them to you when you are older." I tried to explain, to justify my actions, my decision. I tried to make him understand that I had done this because I thought it was in his best interest not to know the truth. I may have never meant to lie but I sure did. For two years and maybe for way more if he hadn't found out. "It was an accident." Still no reaction from him. It was unsettling. I didn't like it. Not at all. I took a deep breath, trying to find my words, trying to think of how to explain my decision to him. "I didn't know what to say... I was in such a mess... She left a note and... Then she rang and... I said she was in hospital because... because I didn't know how to explain. It was complicated. So difficult. And I... I said she was in hospital. And I know it wasn't true. But once I'd said that... I couldn't... I couldn't change it." Because the bigger a lie, the more believable it is, I thought. And two years ago, it was the only thing I could think of when he asked where Judy was. It hurt way too much for me to tell him that his mother left us to go to live somewhere else with the neighbor because she was too overwhelmed to live with us. Learning this at that moment was already painful for me. But then, to actually say it plainly and explain it to my son of thirteen years was the last straw. I had to lie. But when I lied, even though I knew it wasn't right, I couldn't bring myself to say the truth. It was maybe my twisted way of keeping my son from hurting... Or myself from hurting. "Do you understand... Christopher... ? Christopher...? It just... It got out of control and I wish..." I trailed off while staring at Christopher who was looking at me with empty glassy eyes. It felt like he was physically with me yet he was not there, my boy's mind wandering somewhere else. I internally sighed, wishing I'd just been brave enough to tell him the truth back then. It would have spared both of us that distressing moment. I was well aware that it was pointless to talk about this fucked up situation to him since he was so unresponsive, and sick, with vomit all over him. It was something we'd have to talk about later, when he would be well and quite himself again. Then was the time to take care of Christopher. I put my hand on his shoulder, avoiding a patch of vomit, to have his attention on me. "Christopher, we have to get you cleaned up okay?" I gently shook his shoulder, prompting him to stand up so we could clean him up in the bathroom. But he didn't move at all, remaining motionless like a

rag doll. That was really concerning. Most of the time, he would maybe scream while laying on the ground and stay put if overwhelmed. There, he was just laying. Nothing else. I felt distressed at such a sight. "Christopher, I'm going to go to the bathroom and I'm going to run you a hot bath. Then I'm going to come back and take you to the bathroom, OK ? Then I can put the sheets into the washing machine."

I let him know before slowly standing up and heading towards the bathroom. I turned the tap on, checking the temperature of the water while watching it fill the bathtub, resting my hand on its edge. My mind was a wreck, thoughts racing across it at lightning speed. Why ? When ? How ? Many questions echoed in my head as I watched the water rise. I was wondering how Christopher had found the letters in the cupboard. What was he doing in my room in the first place ? Was he searching for something in particular ? I had already told him not to mess my things in my room though, so why ? So many questions bouncing in my head, giving the poor man I am something close to a headache. I was torn away from my thoughts by the warm feeling of the water touching the tip of my fingers. I turned the tap off and went back to my room, where Christopher was waiting for me. He still hadn't moved at all, not even an inch. I approached him, putting my hand once again on his shoulder to catch his attention once more. "Let's do this really gently, Christopher. Let's sit you up and get your clothes off and get you into the bath, OK ? I'm going to have to touch you, but it's going to be all right." I reassured him as I slightly lifted him so I could help him to sit up on the side of my now dirtied bed. Carefully and gently, I lifted his arms so I could take his blue jumper and his red shirt off before putting them aside on the soiled sheets. I made a mental note on not to forget putting both his clothes and the sheets in the washing machine after I had cleaned up Christopher. I then prompted him to stand up which, that time, he did without a single protest before following me as I led him to the bathroom, where his bath was waiting for him. During the whole process, he didn't scream, fight or hit me. Although I was thankful he didn't, it still made my stomach drop. It was so unlikely of Christopher to react like this, letting me touch him. I knew that I owed him an explanation after all that. It would most likely be difficult for me, messy and full of stuttering but I really owed him one. It was time for him to know the truth. To my dismay....

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