

I’ll be Home for Christmas  
By  
Elizabeth Ludwig  
[elizabeth@elizabethludwig.com](mailto:elizabeth@elizabethludwig.com)

*“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*

Luke 15:20

-CHAPTER ONE-

There it was again. The look on Marcus Taggert’s face that said he was totally disgusted. Chris had seen it once before, in this very same office, on this very same spot—only her grandfather had been alive to see it, too.

“I’m surprised you came, Ms. Scheirer.”

Heat invaded Chris’s face. Why wouldn’t he be? She hadn’t been home since she’d asked Grandpa for her share of the inheritance. Her throat convulsed. “Yes, well, it has been awhile.”

“Six years.”

Marcus’s eyes were as cold as their surroundings. Hard, like the massive oak desk he stood behind. Intimidating, like the brass plate with Attorney at Law lettered beneath his name.

She gripped her purse strap tighter. “I suppose you’ve heard that my grandmother intends to remarry.”

At the mention of Carol Scheirer, Marcus’s gaze softened. He took his seat and gestured to one of the rum-colored club chairs in front of his desk, which she slid into, gratefully. “I had

*CHRISTMAS HOMECOMING – “I’ll Be Home for Christmas”*

heard that,” he said. “I’m happy for her. Alex is a good man, and Carol’s been alone a long time.”

No thanks to her. A familiar wave of guilt rippled through Chris’s stomach. She ducked her head to hide her face and pulled an envelope with Marcus’s address from her purse. “Your note said if I was ever back in town, I should stop by. You have something for me?”

“So, you’re here for your grandmother’s wedding, is that it? I wasn’t aware Carol and Alex had set a date.”

“December 26<sup>th</sup>, the day after Christmas.”

His eyes narrowed. “That’s three months away.”

Three months, but not nearly enough time to make amends. Chris returned the letter to its spot beside her billfold and stood. “I’m sorry, Mr. Taggart. This may not have been the best time. I apologize for dropping in this way, I just thought—” she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, “well, I’m not sure what I thought. Please, excuse me. I won’t take up anymore of your time.”

The door seemed much further away than when she’d come in. She crossed the navy carpet, her shoes swishing softly in her haste.

“Christmas?”

Confused for a split second, she paused with her hand on the knob. Marcus was looking at her, calling her by her full name, not referencing the holiday. She shook her head. “It’s Chris. No one’s called me Christmas in years.”

He looked disappointed by the information, but he rose to his feet, one hand extended toward the seat she’d vacated. “Please, come back. I do have something I think you should see.” When she hesitated, he added, “It’s from your grandfather.”

Grandpa Scheirer’s face fluttered in her memory—his cheerful smile, twinkling gaze,

snow-white hair. She trudged back to the chair and sat.

Brought on by stress, the corner of her eye twitched. It wasn’t all that visible, she knew, but it added one more thing to the already hefty stack of weapons Marcus Taggert wielded over her. As if sensing her discomfort, he dispensed with further conversation and retrieved an envelope, yellowed with age, from the filing cabinet.

“I ask that you read it here.” His tone was firm, his face somber, but otherwise barren.

“Another letter?” She willed the shaking from her fingers as she reached for the envelope. She snatched her arm back when their hands grazed.

Marcus laid the letter on the desk, his sharp eyes cutting ribbons through her flesh as he slid it toward her. Gingerly, Chris picked up the note and slipped it from the envelope.

*My Dear Christmas,*

The pain stirred by his bold, strong handwriting slammed her like an avalanche, even after all these years. She swallowed hard and forced her eyes open.

*My Dear Christmas,*

*Welcome home, my darling granddaughter. How I’ve missed you! I had hoped to speak these words to you in person, but since you’re reading this letter, I can only assume it was not to be. Still, I want you to know that I forgive you, my dear one.*

At this, a deep, wet fountain welled up from Chris’s chest and spilled down her cheeks. What a fool she’d been to stay away after she heard of Grandpa’s illness. How selfish to be so consumed with her desire for publication that she’d refused to see anything else.

“Are you all right?”

Marcus’s voice startled her, as though he had no right to be there, an interloper on her lapse into the past. She rubbed her index finger under her lashes. “I’m fine.”

Her strangled tone said otherwise.

Marcus reached behind him for a box of tissues and held it toward her. She took one, blew her nose, then wadded it up and dropped it into the trashcan he slid around the desk.

“Thanks.”

He nodded then sat back and folded his hands over his midsection. Apparently, he intended to wait while she struggled through Grandpa’s letter. She picked it up again.

*I hope you have found happiness. Though it was difficult to see you go, I would not have tried to stop you from experiencing the world for yourself. I pray it has been kind.*

*My darling, though I say once again that I have completely forgiven you, I must ask something of you. I must ask that you make amends with your family, especially your father.*

Her stomach tensed. Her father’s disappointment had been so much sharper than anyone else’s.

*He loves you, Christmas, even if he can’t bring himself to say the words. Your leaving hurt the family deeply, him most of all. Even so, there is something in you that has always been apparent to me, something that tells me the future of our family rests in your hands. I have sought the Lord’s will in this. His peace fills me, which is why I left a gift with Marcus, to be given to you once you prove that you have indeed changed from the self-absorbed child you were. I do not say this to hurt you. I’m merely stating what hopefully you already know.*

*I pray God has blessed, my dear. You have all my love,*

*Grandpa*

Drawing a deep breath, Chris lifted her eyes to Marcus. He watched her intently, his blue eyes measuring. “You knew about this?” she said.

“Yes.”

“How?”

He withdrew a slip of paper from a drawer in his desk and passed it to her. “Read it.”

As in her letter, Grandpa expressed his love for Marcus and his family, but he also asked that he do his best to ensure Chris was worthy of the “gift.”

“Is he kidding?” She jerked her hand and rattled the page. “He expects you to follow me around like a little lost dog? Just what is this ‘gift’ anyway, and why is it so important?”

Marcus reclaimed the note and carefully folded then replaced it inside the envelope.

“Your grandfather was a lot of things, but he wasn’t the kidding kind.”

“No, I guess not.” Chris doused her irritation with a bucket of cool, rational thought. She couldn’t up and leave, not without seeing her grandmother and telling her how sorry she was for hurting everyone. But could she go that extra step? Could she truly make amends?

“Well?”

Again, Marcus’s voice snapped her from her thoughts. She bit her lip. “I don’t know.” To her dismay, she felt her chin tremble. “My father was so angry. I . . . I’m not sure. . .”

His eyes narrowed. “I see.”

Her stomach muscles clenched as he got to his feet, towering over her a second too long before he crossed to the door.

“Well, I can’t say I’m surprised, though I had rather hoped that you’d care enough to at least try and find out what your grandfather left you.” He paused with his hand on the knob.

“Have a safe trip back to New York, Ms. Scheirer. Can I call you a cab?”

Searing anger evaporated the tears in her eyes. Bad enough Grandpa favored this arrogant, egotistic snob, but Marcus deemed himself fit to judge her, too? She’d just see about that. Gripping her purse to her side, she lifted her chin and got up from the chair. “No, thank you,

Elizabeth Ludwig

6

*CHRISTMAS HOMECOMING – “I’ll Be Home for Christmas”*

Mr. Taggert. I’ve changed my mind. I’ll be staying in Boulder, after all.”