

GRACE COMES HOME

22-DE06-W32

When her daughter gets engaged to the son of a man her father swindled, a disgraced socialite who is now a small-town pastor's wife must decide whether to divulge her true identity.

FADE IN:

INT. SHOALS MANSION - VICTORIAN CONSERVATORY - DAY

Blonde, freckled, and scrawny, OLIVIA (10) and her best friend DAVID (11) sit cross-legged in the corner beneath the branches of a potted orange tree. Each has a piece of the forbidden fruit, and they gobble it while hiding from NANNY CRABBE, (40) a stocky, uniformed, no-nonsense British woman.

OLIVIA

Hurry up, David. Nanny Crabby Pants will kill us if she finds us here again.

NANNY CRABBE (O.S.)

Children! I know you're in here. Show yourselves. Right now.

The children stuff the last bits of orange in their mouths, and juices dribble off their chins. They wipe their hands on their clothing and emerge from hiding.

NANNY CRABBE (CONT'D)

There you are. There's no time for this foolishness. Olivia, follow me into the house right now, and no arguing. David, your father is out front. Go home.

EXT. THE SHOALS - SIDEWALK AND FRONT STEPS

When they emerge from the conservatory, David and Olivia hear a commotion. They bolt past the nanny and run to the front of the house.

Olivia's father is being perp-walked down the steps to a waiting squad car. Nanny Crabbe catches up and prevents Olivia from reaching him. Reporters shout questions and lean across police barriers. One REPORTER holds a microphone and speaks into a camera.

REPORTER

Philip Penderton has been arrested today at The Shoals, his exclusive home in the Hamptons, after an investigation exposed his Ponzi scheme that bilked hundreds of people from their life savings. With me is William Carson, his friend, but sadly, also his primary victim. Mr. Carson, what are your feelings today when you see Philip Penderton on his way to prison?

The crowd jostles disheveled businessman WILLIAM CARSON (42) too close to the reporter, and he shoves the microphone out of his face. David reaches his side and squeezes him around the waist.

WILLIAM

No comment. Come on, David. Let's go.

William escorts David to a waiting car. Olivia and David call out each other's names, but their cries are drowned out by the crowd noise.

EXT. THE SHOALS - CLOSEUP FACE OF DISTRAUGHT CHILD OLIVIA

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PARSONAGE KITCHEN - CLOSEUP FACE OF PRESENT-DAY OLIVIA (GRACE) - NIGHT

OLIVIA (56) now uses her middle name, GRACE. Her chestnut hair is cut in a stylish chin-length bob, and she wears very little makeup. She dries dishes washed and stacked in the strainer by her graying but trim husband, ROGER (58). The DOORBELL RINGS.

ROGER

Never a private moment in the parsonage.
Let the pastor get it.

Roger dries his hands on Grace's towel and pecks her on the cheek. He strides to the front door and opens it.

EXT. PARSONAGE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

SOPHIE (22), the Barstow's exuberant, knockout daughter, stands on the porch arm-in-arm with JACK (25), the consummate preppie jock. They wear hats, coats and gloves in the frigid weather.

SOPHIE

Surprise! Hi, Daddy. Where's Mom?

Roger embraces Sophie. Jack awkwardly extends his hand, and Roger shakes it.

GRACE (O.S.)

Did I hear my baby is home from college?

Grace blows past Roger and clutches Sophie. The women squeal and twirl while Roger sizes up Jack.

ROGER

Sweetheart, we need an introduction.

SOPHIE

Oh, sorry. This is Jack. We've been together four months, but I didn't want to tell you until we were serious.

Roger and Grace exchange a concerned look.

ROGER

How serious are you?

Sophie whips off her glove to flash a huge diamond ring.

SOPHIE

Mom. Dad. We're engaged!

There is a general celebration. Roger and Grace's responses are polite, but not effusive.

INT. PARSONAGE DINING ROOM

The group enjoys pie and coffee while getting acquainted.

ROGER

Jack, it seems we have a lot of catching up to do. Tell us about yourself.

JACK

I'm earning my MBA at Cornell so I can join my dad's company.

GRACE

What business is he in?

JACK

It's a software development firm. My father is David Carson, of Carson Enterprises.

Grace blanches. She collects the plates and mumbles an excuse as she rushes into the kitchen. The dishes clatter until she puts them down and leans hard on the sink with both hands. A few moments later, Roger brings the coffee cups.

ROGER

Is this the David Carson I think it is?

GRACE

I'm afraid so.

ROGER

You should tell them right now and clear the air.

GRACE

I never wanted Sophie to know my past. Of all the men in this world she could fall in love with, why --

Sophie enters the kitchen, carrying the last of the dishes. Grace shoos Roger out to keep Jack company, and she slaps on a plastic smile while Sophie gives her a closer look at the engagement ring.

EXT. PARSONAGE PORCH - DAY (A MONTH LATER)

Grace retrieves letters from the mailbox and shuffles through them until she freezes, grasping a calligraphed invitation. She takes stiff steps inside.

INT. PARSONAGE LIVING ROOM

Grace collapses on the sofa beside Roger, who is scrolling on his phone. She opens the invitation and groans, which finally captures Roger's attention.

GRACE

No, no, no. This can't be happening.

ROGER

What?

GRACE

The engagement party is at The Shoals. I can't do it, Roger. I can't go back with him there.

ROGER

It was more than twenty-five years ago. Time has moved on, and so should you.

GRACE

When he got rich, David could have bought any estate in the Hamptons. But he bought our home out of spite and kicked Mom and me out like squatters.

ROGER

The lawyers were closing in anyway. Wouldn't you rather David buy it than a stranger?

GRACE

I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm not going, and that's that.

ROGER

Why don't we talk about what's really bothering you?

Grace bows her head, but Roger tucks a finger under her chin and lifts it until she meets his gaze.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You think someone will recognize you.

GRACE

Why would they? I've changed my name and my hair color. I don't own flashy jewelry or designer clothing. I'm Walmart, not Saks Fifth Avenue. Someone rich people don't bother to notice. A nobody.

ROGER

Not true. You'll always be a somebody to me, and especially to God.

(tenderly)

Sophie and Jack finding each other has to be more than a coincidence, honey.

Roger puts a hand on Grace's shoulder, but she shrugs it off.

ROGER (CONT'D)

God is up to something, and it involves you. Don't you want to know what it is?

GRACE

No. Not particularly. It's just a mean trick to rub the past in my face.

ROGER.

That's not how God does things. Before you get mad at him, you should remember what he said on this subject.

GRACE

Oh, please. I don't need a sermon right now.

ROGER

(teasing)

Me? I only preach on Sundays.

Grace crosses her arms and rolls her eyes.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Besides, you know the verses as well as I do.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

All through the Bible, people were exiled because of their sins. But if they repented, God brought some of them home.

GRACE

David and his family live in The Shoals, not me. I'm still an outcast, and going home is impossible.

ROGER

For now, but sometimes God returned people to the very homes they had to leave, and he promised never again to uproot them.

Grace gets up from the sofa, walks to the hearth, and looks at a picture of her mother. She picks up a small photo of her father and turns it facedown.

GRACE

I've been more than uprooted, Roger. Every trace of my former life is gone. I can't walk into that house. There are too many ghosts and old memories.

Roger rises, positions himself behind Grace, and hugs her. He kisses her on the cheek, and she lays her head back on his shoulder.

ROGER

Then make new ones. Happy memories with Sophie and Jack. It's time to rebuild, Grace. Dig deep, tell Sophie the truth, and go to the party. Do you want God's blessing of restoration, or do you want to live as an outcast forever?

INT. BARSTOW'S CHEVY SEDAN - NIGHT (THREE WEEKS LATER)

Grace has the passenger mirror down, checking her hair and makeup. She wipes lipstick off her teeth.

ROGER

I wish you'd relax. You look beautiful. No one will see lanky, blonde Olivia Penderton. They will see a curvy, ravishing brunette far too sexy to be the mother of the bride.

GRACE

You think you're making this easier, but you're not. And did you just say I'm fat?

ROGER

No. Curvy. There's a difference, and I like it. If you wanted this to be easier, you should have come clean with Sophie.

GRACE

I just couldn't. Not yet. Please don't badger me.

EXT. THE SHOALS - DRIVEWAY

Roger parks, exits the car, and circles around to help Grace out. She fixates on the house, eyes wide, and Roger steadies her when she wobbles on her 4-inch heels. The ornate double doors open slowly. DAVID CARSON (57) and his gorgeous wife step out, smiling. Sophie and Jack stand in the cavernous hallway behind them. David waves.

FLASHBACK EXT. THE SHOALS - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Uniformed men carry the last of YOUNG ADULT OLIVIA'S family possessions down the steps and load them in a moving van. Slender and blonde, Olivia helps her weeping mother into the passenger seat of a beat-up Honda Civic. She glances up to the doorway. YOUNG ADULT DAVID wears a smirk as he stands beside his mother and waves goodbye.

EXT. THE SHOALS - FRONT STEPS - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Grace stands immobile on the steps. Her hand flies to her throat and her mouth freezes in an "o" of horror. She drops Roger's arm, whirls, and sprints into the darkness down a sidewalk beside the house. Sophie tries to push by David out the front door, but he blocks her way. Roger starts after Grace, but David's words stop him.

DAVID

No. Wait. I think I know where she's gone.

SOPHIE

But how could you? She doesn't even know where she's gone.

(turns to Roger)

Daddy?

ROGER

It's okay, Sophie. Go after her, David.

David darts after Grace while Roger ascends the grand staircase and shakes hands with Mrs. Carson. After a brief greeting, he hustles the small group inside.

INT. THE SHOALS - VICTORIAN CONSERVATORY

Grace is seated cross-legged on the floor with her cast-off stilettos beside her. Her legs are covered by a voluminous black chiffon skirt, and she is hidden by the lower branches of the orange tree, which is now significantly bigger. She hears FOOTSTEPS and scoots farther into the dark corner. When someone pulls back the branches, Grace is mortified to spy David peering at her.

DAVID

I thought I might find you here.

David sits beside Grace and imitates her pose, which mirrors when they were children. She inches away, and he scoots closer until their shoulders touch.

DAVID (CONT'D)

There's just one thing missing.

David plucks two ripe oranges from a nearby branch and tosses one to Grace. She catches it one-handed. He begins to peel his, but Grace simply holds hers.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Nanny Crabby Pants doesn't work here anymore.

GRACE

(chuffs a laugh)

Her name was Nanny Crabbe.

DAVID

Don't look at me. You're the one who called her Crabby Pants.

(grows serious)

Olivia.

GRACE

I'm Grace now. Olivia has been gone a long time. How did you know it was me? I look completely different.

DAVID

Yes. And you're still dazzling. But I have to admit I had some help.

Grace lifts one eyebrow.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I hired a private investigator to look into the family of my son's fiancée.

Grace smacks his forearm.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Ow. That hurt. Don't blame me. I had to protect Jack from gold diggers.

GRACE

Instead you found worse, didn't you? You found gold thieves.

DAVID

You're not a thief. Except for oranges.
(turns solemn)
You were just a child, and you're not responsible for what your father did.

GRACE

Tell that to the paparazzi who made my teenage years a living hell.

DAVID

It wasn't easy for me either, Livvie.

Grace scowls at the use of her former nickname.

DAVID (CONT'D)

What? You'll always be Livvie to me. It's better than Olivia.

David bumps his shoulder against hers.

DAVID (CONT'D)

We had to move to the city, and my father took a job in a factory while he scraped enough money together for us to live on.

GRACE

I suppose I wasn't the only one who got kicked out of my home.

DAVID

No, you weren't. And the older I got, the madder I got. You and your mom got to stay at The Shoals for more than a decade. Meantime, my family lived in a two-story cracker-box in the Bronx.

GRACE

This place turned into more of a prison than a home.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

I should thank you for buying us out. I'm sure it was a happy day for you.

DAVID

I thought I was happy. It seemed like the perfect revenge after my video game sold to Nintendo. I was rolling in the dough, and I just wanted to rub my success in your face.

GRACE

Well, congratulations. You did. You're living in The Shoals, and I'm in an itty-bitty parsonage in New Jersey. I'm happy there, but no where else but The Shoals will ever feel like home to me.

DAVID

Revenge may be a dish best served cold, but it also poisons the chef.

GRACE

(Sarcastic)

So now you're a philosopher?

David leans his head back against the glass, sighs, and closes his eyes.

DAVID

All I cooked up was bitterness.

His eyes open again, and he takes Grace's hand in his.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Livvie, for all of it. Our parents are all gone, so let's look to the future instead of the past.

Olivia pulls her hand away and puts distance between them.

DAVID (CONT'D)

No, I mean it. My son is deliriously happy with your daughter. My wife is crazy about her, and I am, too. She's smart, unpretentious, and one of the nicest people I've ever met. She's a lot like her mom.

Grace turns her head away and dabs at a tear.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Even an exile should be given a chance to come home.

GRACE
Have you been talking to Roger?

DAVID
Maybe.

GRACE
(softening)
I'll forgive him. And you.
(pauses)
But I need it, too. I'm so very sorry for
what happened. Do you forgive what my
father did? Truly?

DAVID
Truly. And from the bottom of my heart.
Let's have an orange to celebrate.

David finishes peeling his orange, snatches Grace's, and
peels it, too. He smooshes the fruit in her hand until
the juice drips through her fingers. Grace whips the
excess off onto David's trousers.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Hey! Watch it. My wife will kill me. I
have an engagement party to host.

GRACE
(sobering)
I can't face Jack and Sophie without
their knowing the truth. And what about
your wife? Does she know?

DAVID
Not yet, and neither do the kids. Someday
we'll tell them together, but not
tonight. Tonight is for celebrating.
Drink some Dom Perignon from the famous
Shoals wine cellar, nibble the salad made
with artichokes grown right here in your
mother's conservatory, and for goodness'
sake --

David chomps down his orange and juice rolls down his
chin. He wipes it with his sleeve.

DAVID (CONT'D)
(talking with his mouth full)
Enjoy an orange.

Grace laughs at his antics, examines the orange still in
her hand, and eats it. They rise, stroll to the tool
bench, and use a towel to clean themselves up.

Grace dons her shoes and picks up her discarded orange peel. They start back to the house.

EXT. THE SHOALS - PATH TO THE BACK DOOR

Grace has a hand tucked in David's elbow as he escorts her to the house. Through a window into the dining room, Sophie and Jack can be seen laughing and embracing each other beside a large cake. David stops. His eyes wander over the lovely home, lights sparkling from every window.

DAVID

Look at the grand old lady, Livvie. There was a day when we both thought we'd never see her again.

GRACE

I never stopped missing her.

DAVID

She belongs to me now, but also to Jack. Who by some crazy "God-incidence" found Sophie. They will fill the hallways someday with our grandchildren -- yours and mine.

GRACE

Maybe we need to send your fancy PI to find Nanny Crabby Pants.

DAVID

Better her guarding the orange tree than me.

(getting serious)

Livvie, The Shoals will belong to both our families, and I couldn't be happier. What a miracle!

David steers her to the kitchen door and opens it with a flourish. Light spills out with the sounds of the party -- LAUGHTER, CLINKING DISHES, and the hum of HAPPY CONVERSATION. He extends his hand to Grace.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Welcome home, Olivia Grace.

Grace hesitates, then brightens. She accepts David's hand and they walk through the doorway. The door swings shut behind them.

Lying on the stoop is Grace's orange peel.

FADE OUT.