

Departure

I know you don't feel this way, but I think that this is what is best for all of us," said Jamie, closing the drapes to block out the sun. She turned her head over her shoulder and sighed, "I don't want to sound controlling, I'm sorry. I know that it's not only my decision to make, but at least think about what I'm saying."

Her sister looked at her, thinking about what she had said. The clock was ticking.

"Okay," said Rose, pushing herself up off the couch. She leaned forward slightly to grab the table in front of her and started to move towards her sister at the window. "I'm thinking."

Jamie walked to the kitchen and opened the envelope that sat on the counter. Careful not to harm the contents, she gently pulled out a long, hand-written letter. This was why they had come here. She walked back into the living room to try to persuade her sister.

"Read this," she said, pushing the letter into Rose's hands.

Rose looked down at the letter, curious. She gently unfolded the paper and began to read. Her eyes darting back and forth, she read it at least twice to make sure it was real. Matilda Jenkins had made her decision. Tracing her index finger over the signature at the bottom of the page, Rose looked up at Jamie.

"I don't believe it. No, I- I'm not ready to do this," she looked back down at her mother's letter.

"Now you have the proof, and we all know that this is what she would have wanted. It is what she wanted, it's written out right in front of you, and you still can't believe it?" Jamie looked back at Rose in disbelief.

Rose stared back at her younger sister, wondering how she could make this decision to quickly.

"What if she wakes up? Suddenly comes out of all of this – this state?" Rose placed the letter down on the window sill, letting her arms fall to her sides.

"Rose, you're forgetting the gravity of the situation. Do you really want to let our mother sit there, as a vegetable, for all eternity? Spend holidays at her bedside, talking to someone you know will never talk back? Do you know if she's going to wake up? If so, say it. Because the doctors don't know when, if, or how she could pull out of this. I sure as hell don't know if she's

going to. We have to let her go,” said Jamie, staring Rose. Her fists clenched, Jamie moved to sit down on the couch, but Rose stopped her.

“I’ll let you know that I understand the gravity of the situation very well, thank you. If you doubt for one minute that I don’t think she could live like a vegetable with nothing ever changing, then you’re wrong,” Rose whispered back, this time clutching her sister’s arm. “I have to think about this. We have to think about this – together.”

Jamie’s facial expression softened slightly. She sighed, sat down, and rested her chin on her hands.

“I’m sorry, Rose. But I agree. We have to think together on this. Let’s go back to the hospital and think about it some more there. I can’t stay here much longer knowing that mom’s never going to come walking into her own living room again,” Jamie said gently.

Rose nodded her head in agreement, then walked to the foyer and grabbed her coat. Jamie, who had never taken off her warm jacket, got up to join her sister. Buttoning the final large, black button on her coat, Rose took a sweeping look at the house. This was where her mother had lived for past 20 years. It shouldn’t be this empty.

“Let’s go,” whispered Jamie, placing a soft hand on her sister’s shoulder. “I’ll drive.”

Rose opened the door slowly, taking in every last detail she could. Walking towards the car, the wind howled. When they reached the car, Rose climbed in the passenger seat and continued to stare at the old house. Jamie opened her door, but stopped for a minute to take one last look at the place. Comfortable with her decision to move on, Jamie sat down and started the car.

“I’m glad you took me out here for myself,” said Rose, wiping away tears. “I needed to see the letter. I also think I just needed to see the house again, so I thank you for that. Now let’s go and see her.”

Jamie shifted the car into reverse and backed out of the driveway. It was a short drive to the hospital, but every familiar sight along the roads caused her pain. That was the grocery store where their mother went shopping, that was where their mother got her hair done every Friday. Every two minutes, a storefront was enough to almost bring Jamie to tears. Once at the hospital,

they walked up to their mother's room together, shoulders nearly rubbing against each other with every step they took. Finally, they reached their mother's room on the third floor. Both daughters stood next to the bed, staring down at their mother.

Rose reached out to hold her mother's hand and squeezed it, hoping for one last sign of life. If this last outreach wouldn't wake her up, maybe it was time to let go. Tears still falling down her face, Rose looked over at her sister.

"She looks to peaceful, just lying here, don't you think?"

Jamie looked at her mother. She was just laying there, no movement, no signs of life beyond a heartbeat. It was depressing to see someone who was so strong reduced to a hospital bed, dependant on tubes and machines to keep her in a world that she had already left.

"She looks peaceful, yes. Maybe she is at peace, but she's not here, Rose. I can't see any peace in that," Jamie said, looking at her mother's chest. Up and down, up and down. She was only breathing because of the machines now.

Rose studied her sister's face. Jamie was scared too, but had accepted her mother's situation better than she had. Jamie knew that the coma was like being stuck halfway between two very different worlds. Still clutching her mother's hand, she rested her free hand on Jamie's knee and looked at her.

"It's time," she said. "Seeing this, reading the letter – letting go is the only reasonable option. I think I'm ready to say goodbye."

Jamie nodded, stood up, and went to get the doctor.

A couple of minutes later, the tall, gangly doctor walked into the room. This wasn't the first time he'd had to give this speech.

"Jamie, Rose, you both understand that your mother is in a coma and that it's unlikely she will wake up. If we turn off these machines, she will die naturally without any prolonged pain or suffering,' the doctor paused to make eye contact with the sisters. "Are you ready to make your decision?"

The sisters looked at each other one last time and nodded, this time both had tears streaming down their cheeks. If this was what their mother wanted, if this was the best thing to do for her, then it was time to do it.

“Yes, we understand. We’ve decided to let her go. It’s time for her to find peace,” said Rose. Her voice was stronger than before, and she knew that this was the right thing to do.

“And you, Jamie?” asked the doctor.

“Yes, I agree. Thank you,” responded Jamie.

The doctor left the room to get the necessary paperwork, and assured them that he would be back soon enough. In the meantime, the sisters could say goodbye to their mother.

“Thank you, again, for taking me back to her house,” said Rose. “I don’t know how I could have done this without one last look around, a reminder of her life.”

“I know,” said Jamie, “and I’m glad you agreed to come. I’m also glad you read the letter, and that you’re here with me. I may pretend to be stronger, but I did not want to face this alone.”

“We never want to let go of something, someone that is so permanent, you know? And the idea of losing a parent, a sibling, a child . . . I hate it,” Rose had to stop to catch her breath. “I couldn’t.”

Jamie looked over at her and held out her hand. Now Jamie was crying harder, and all she could do was listen to her sister as her heart broke.

“It’s unfair. It’s unfair that she’s trapped here, between life and death and I’m too selfish to see what’s going on and I’m sorry. Oh Jamie, oh mother, I am so sorry,” Rose was shaking now, finally getting a chance to let out all of her pain and fears. She was staring at her mother now, almost preaching to her love to her. Yet it didn’t matter now, not because her mother couldn’t hear her, but because her mother already knew this.

Jamie looked at Rose, holding her close. She knew goodbye would be devastating, but now it was on their terms. Her mother didn’t need saving or another month strapped to machines in an unfamiliar place. She needed rest. It was time to let her mother’s soul go, time to free it. Just then, the doctor walked back into the room.

“Would you like some more time with your mother?”

“No, thank you, I think we’ve said our goodbyes. Now we just want her to be in peace,” said Rose, slightly smiling at the thought of letting her mother move on.

“Very well then,” said the doctor, beginning to turn off all of the machines. “I’ll leave you two alone with her now, for the final moments.”

The room was quiet now, no more beeping from countless machines. Just their mother's slow, shallow breaths. As the two sisters sat next to their mother, they studied the lines on her face that had seen so much over the years. They looked at her eyelids, at her hair, at her hands – each one in the grasp of a loving daughter. The breathing grew shallower and tears dripped down onto their mother's bed. With both daughters at her side, Matilda took her last breath and journeyed on into the unknown.