

### Chapter 134

Ryan sat comfortably at the round corner table of the prestigious Vilaris Bites, a restaurant known in the city not only for its luxurious décor but also for its reputation as the food spot of the extremely wealthy.

Across from him, Claudia sat elegantly, her back was straight, her glossy hair resting over her shoulders as she delicately cut into her meal.

She glanced up every now and then, smiling faintly at Ryan, who seemed calmer than he had been in weeks.

"This place is beautiful," Claudia said softly, twirling her fork gently. "I'm glad you chose here. It feels... normal, after everything that has happened."

Ryan gave her a small smile, sipping his wine slowly. "Normal is something I want you to have more of. Even if just for an evening."

Claudia's heart warmed at his words. She opened her mouth to reply, but before she could, Ryan's gaze shifted from her toward the large double doors at the entrance of the restaurant.

He froze for a second. 1

Claudia followed his eyes and saw them—Elizabeth and Julian, stepping into the restaurant with high shoulders.

Elizabeth's eyes immediately caught Ryan's. She stiffened in place, her body pausing as her entire face hardened.

She hadn't expected him here, she wasn't ready to see him again, not after her vow to bring him down.

Ryan blinked once, tilting his head slightly, almost amused at the



coincidence, but he didn't speak.

Claudia, sensing the tension, looked from him to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth tugged at Julian's sleeve, whispering harshly, "Of all the places ... he has to be here?"

Julian tightened his jaw, his hand settling on her back to steady her. "Ignore him. We'll eat, we'll leave. Don't give him the satisfaction of thinking he unsettles you."

But Elizabeth's eyes, burning with anger and bitterness, lingered on Ryan a second longer before she finally turned away with a huff and followed Julian to their table.

They sat two tables away from Ryan and Claudia. It was close enough that every whisper could be heard.

The waiter approached politely, placing two menus in front of them.

"Good evening, sir, madam. Welcome to Vilaris Bites. May I suggest some of our specialties tonight?"

Elizabeth forced a smile and waved her hand over the menu. "Actually, could you... explain them to us? We've never been here before. How do they taste?"

The waitress, young and cheerful, leaned forward slightly, eager to please customers. "Of course, madam. This first option, our signature Lobster à la Royale is prepared with saffron butter, truffle oil, and imported white pearls. It is... exquisite, very rich and delicate in taste. Guests often describe it as the pinnacle of ocean flavors."

Elizabeth nodded slowly. "Mhm. That sounds... interesting. And the price?"



The waitress's smile didn't change as she answered smoothly, "That particular dish is ten thousand dollars, madam, per plate."

Elizabeth's eyes widened so dramatically she nearly dropped the menu. Her lips parted but no words came out at first.

"Ten... what?" she whispered sharply. "Ten thousand?"

The waitress nodded politely. "Yes, madam. It is one of our signature meals."

Julian leaned in closer, his jaw tightening. He whispered sharply, "We can't possibly spend that much on dinner. Not now, not with the wedding coming up. Be realistic, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth's face flushed red. She looked around quickly, her eyes darting toward Ryan's table, terrified he might have heard them. Her pride screamed that she couldn't be seen struggling like this for price if food, not in front of him.

She leaned toward Julian, speaking under her breath, "Lower your voice. He's right there."

Julian glanced at Ryan briefly, his lips curling into irritation. "So what if he hears? It doesn't matter."

"It does matter," Elizabeth snapped in a whisper. "Do you want him to laugh at us? Do you want him to think we can't even afford a meal here at Vilaris Bites?"

Ryan, silently cutting into his steak, didn't look at them directly, but his ears caught every word. Claudia noticed the slight curve of amusement at his lips but said nothing.

Elizabeth cleared her throat, turning back to the waitress. "And, um... the



second meal on the list? The Imperial Caviar Medley? How much is that?"

The waitress's voice remained perfectly professional. "That would be fifteen thousand dollars, madam. For a serving."

Elizabeth's stomach twisted so violently she thought she might faint. Her hand gripped the edge of the table.

"Fifteen thousand?" she croaked. "For... for fish eggs?"

Julian closed his menu with a snap, his patience thinning. "Elizabeth, this is ridiculous. We are not staying here. Let's go find somewhere reasonable."

"No!" Elizabeth's voice came out louder than she intended, and a few heads turned briefly in their direction. She quickly lowered her voice, leaning in with desperation. "No, we can't leave. It would be humiliating. What if Ryan saw us walking out? He'd know. He'd know we couldn't afford it."

Julian glared at her, whispering harshly, "He already knows. Why are you torturing yourself?"

Elizabeth ignored him, forcing a smile toward the waitress. "What about the cheapest thing on your menu? What's... the least expensive dish?"

The waitress paused for a brief moment, her polite smile never fading. "That would be our Lobster à la Royale, the one I mentioned earlier, at ten thousand dollars, madam."

Both Elizabeth and Julian froze. Their eyes met in shared shock and horror.

"Ten thousand... is the cheapest?" Elizabeth whispered, her throat dry.



"Yes, madam," the waitress said kindly, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. 1

Julian dragged his hand across his face, his voice was low and stern. "That's it. We're leaving. This is insane."

He stood halfway from his seat, reaching for Elizabeth's arm. But Elizabeth, stubborn and humiliated, yanked her arm back.

"No," she hissed. "We are not walking out of here. I won't give Ryan the satisfaction." 1

"Elizabeth—" Julian growled, his voice thick with suppressed anger. 1

Before he could finish, he leaned forward, his hand gripping her arm firmly, trying to pull her up. Elizabeth resisted, her chair screeching against the floor as she tried to hold her ground.

In the chaos, Julian's elbow knocked into the edge of a waiter's tray being carried past.

And in one horrifying moment, the tray tilted, and five plates of exotic dishes, together worth over fifty thousand dollars, slid forward and crashed directly onto the table of a very wealthy-looking guest.

The woman let out a bloodcurdling scream, leaping from her chair as the expensive sauces and seafood splattered across her sparkling diamond gown. Gasps filled the restaurant. Every head turned.

Elizabeth's heart stopped. Her face drained of all color as she stood frozen in place.

"What have you done to my dress?!" the lady screamed in agony...