

Chapter 16

Ryan stood up slowly, his hands now holding two of Matthew's files. He blinked in horror, his throat became dry. "I didn't realize it was you," he said quietly, not meeting her eyes.

Matthew chuckled, adjusting his cufflinks as if the sight of Ryan bored him. "Oh, you didn't? Or maybe you just didn't want to look us in the eye."

Jessica folded her arms, stepping closer. "You know, I still remember how you told me I'd regret leaving you for Matthew," she said, her tone filled with sarcasm. "But take a good look at yourself, Ryan. You even looked better back then. At least you had a decent phone. What's that in your hand now? A broken-down iphone 7? For God's sake, do you realize we are in 2025?"

She huffed and leaned toward him as if inspecting him more closely. "God, even your jeans are faded. Are those fake sneakers too?"

Ryan kept silent. His eyes dropped to the sidewalk, but his mind wasn't there. It drifted back to his university days—back to the day Jessica had humiliated him in front of the whole class. Back when she posted their breakup on the school's public page, laughing about how she had upgraded from "a beggar to a millionaire's son, Matthew." Everyone had laughed and mocked him for weeks. 1

The files in his hand trembled slightly, but he still tried to keep calm.

Matthew stepped forward and snatched the files from his hand. "Let me guess," he said with a smirk. "You still haven't done anything with your life? Still walking around with fake dreams and empty pockets?"

Jessica laughed coldly. "Did you ever get a job? Or are you still surviving

off handouts and cheap pity from women?"

Ryan looked up at them. His voice was calm as he spoke. "I don't have time for this. I'm going somewhere important."

He took a step past them, but they followed closely behind, their words were sharp like knives to his chest.

"Important?" Jessica repeated, snorting. "You mean the bus stop? Or maybe you've started working as a street cleaner?" She laughed hard.

Matthew smirked. "Five years, Ryan! It's been five whole years since school ended, and this is what you've become? A broke nobody walking in the streets?"

Ryan clenched his jaw, forcing himself not to react. His eyes focused on the road ahead. Each word they threw at him echoed in his ears, but he buried them deep inside.

He just needed to get to the hospital. That's all that mattered.

But then, as he approached the bus stop he walked by a wide pothole filled with muddy water. And in that exact moment, he heard the sudden sound of a car behind him. Before he could react—

SPLASH!

A huge wave of muddy water exploded from the pothole and soaked his entire lower pants.

The brown, stinking liquid clung to his jeans and splashed across his sneakers. It smelled like trash water from a clogged gutter.

Gasps erupted from bystanders nearby. Some laughed. A few shook their heads with pity. Others even pulled out their phones to record it.

Ryan stood frozen, fists clenched at his sides. His face burned red with shame, but he didn't move. His heart pounded, and his wet pants stuck to his legs like glue.

The car slowed down and stopped just a few feet ahead.

The tinted window rolled down with a soft sound.

And there she was, Jessica. Her arrogant face popping out through the window, wearing a grin that stretched ear to ear.

"Oops," she said sweetly, her voice was filled with fake innocence. " Didn't see you there. We have no idea how it feels to walk on foot like this."

Matthew leaned toward her from the driver's seat, his sunglasses perched on his nose. "Life's been good to us, hasn't it, babe?" he said with a smile. "I own Nissan Versa, worth over \$17,000 dollars. Have you ever even owned a thousand dollars before? Meanwhile, Ryan's still walking the streets like a homeless stray."

They both burst into laughter, the sound was sharp and painful.

And Ryan just stood there—soaked, embarrassed, silent.

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