



## Chapter 17

Matthew threw a wink at Ryan and stepped hard on the gas pedal. The Nissan roared as it dashed away, disappearing down the road in seconds. A trail of laughter echoed from the car as it sped off.

"Jessica..." Ryan muttered as his jaw clenched.

Ryan stood still for a few moments, his soaked pants clinging tightly to his legs, his fists clenched at his sides. Mud dripped slowly from the hem of his jeans onto the sidewalk. Strangers passed by, stealing quick glances at him. A few looked away awkwardly. Others whispered and laughed behind their hands.

Feeling the stares growing too heavy, Ryan blinked himself out of the daze and slowly started walking. His legs felt heavier with each step, but he kept moving.

"Maybe you didn't regret it in 5 years, Jessica... but you will," Ryan muttered as he knew he wouldn't let this pass.

By the time he reached the bus stop, the bus was already there, passengers were rushing to get in. He stepped in quietly, ignoring the glances from the few passengers inside. No one said a word, but the mud on his jeans spoke louder than any insult.

He picked a seat near the window and looked out the entire ride, trying to calm his racing thoughts. Aside Elizabeth and Julian, he just added one more enemy to his list; Jessica and Matthew.

After twenty minutes, the bus pulled up in front of the hospital. Ryan quickly got down and jogged toward the entrance. He wiped his palms against his shirt as he pushed the glass doors open.

Ryan spotted Dr. Jerry near the reception desk, flipping through a patient file.

"Doctor!" Ryan called out as he approached, still slightly out of breath.

Dr. Jerry looked up and smiled. "Ryan! You made it."

"How's my mom?" Ryan asked. His eyes were wide with hope.

Dr. Jerry nodded reassuringly. "She's doing fine. The surgery went smoothly like I said, and she's recovering faster than we expected. She's asleep right now, still unconscious, but stable."

Ryan exhaled slowly, the tension in his shoulders easing. "Thank God," he whispered. "I really wanted to tell her the good news in person, but... I'm just glad she's okay."

Dr. Jerry placed a hand on his shoulder. "You'll have time to talk to her soon. Right now, she just needs rest. But you can see her, if you want."

"Yes," Ryan said immediately. "Please."

The doctor led him through the corridor and stopped in front of Room 112. Dr. Jerry pushed the door open slowly, and Ryan stepped in.

His mother lay on the bed, looking peaceful. Her face was pale, but she no longer looked like she was in pain. A slow, steady beep from the heart monitor filled the room. Her chest rose and fell gently under the hospital blanket.

Ryan moved closer and stood by her side. He didn't say anything, only remembering how Elizabeth had left his mother for dead, denying him her support, but now, he was on top of the game. He just looked at her — grateful that she was alive. A warm smile touched his lips.



Then suddenly, his phone rang.

He pulled it from his pocket and glanced at the screen. It was Claudia.

He quickly stepped out of the room and answered. "Hello?"

"Boss?" Claudia's voice came through, sounding very gentle and polite. "Good morning, sir. I've been trying to reach you. I checked your room at the mansion, and when I didn't see you, I got a little worried. Are you alright, sir?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Ryan replied calmly. "I'm at the hospital. I came to check on my mom. She made it through the surgery."

"Oh! That's wonderful news, boss," Claudia said with genuine relief. "Thank God she's okay."

"Yeah, I'm glad too," Ryan replied.

"Sir, I understand you're busy, but if I may remind you..." she said carefully, "we only have today to prepare for your Executive Meeting tomorrow morning. Everything has to be perfect, and your presence is really important. Do you think you'll be able to come back soon, boss?"