

Chapter 18

Ryan nodded slowly. "Yeah... I'll be back soon."

"And, sir," she added softly, "there's one more thing. We'll need your old laptop. The one you mentioned you used to create the Nova account. The company will request to verify the original profile data. You said all the first documents were on it."

Ryan paused.

His eyes widened slowly as his memory flashed.

His laptop.

He had left it behind at Elizabeth's house, the McCarthy mansion.

His heart sank.

He remembered the last thing Elizabeth told him—that if he didn't come back for his things, she'd throw them out in the rain. And knowing her temper... she could've already done something crazy.

"Claudia," he said slowly, "I'll try... but that laptop is at the McCarthy mansion. And... there might be a problem."

"Sir, I understand," Claudia said gently. "But please, try to get it back, because it would be used to verify your identity in case of any future dispute. If there's anything I can do to assist, just say the word. I'll be waiting for your return, boss."

"I'll go now," he said, swallowing hard.

"Alright, boss. Please be safe," she added, then hung up.

Ryan stood frozen for a moment, the weight of the situation hitting him.

That laptop wasn't just any device. It was the key to everything. His Nova

profile, his verification files, his first data, everything was on it. And if Elizabeth did anything to it... He might lose his position at Nova.

Ryan's heart thudded in his chest as he imagined losing everything that had just changed his life for the better.

He ran back to Dr. Jerry.

"Doctor, please let me know the moment she wakes up," Ryan said, motioning toward his mother's room.

Dr. Jerry nodded, sensing the urgency in his eyes. "Where are you going?"

"I have something important to get," Ryan said quickly. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

With that, he rushed out of the hospital, not caring that his jeans were still wet with dry mud. His legs moved fast as he headed back to the place he hoped he would never have to return to.

The McCarthy mansion.

It took him over thirty minutes to get there by bus and some walking. The sun had climbed higher in the sky now, making the heat sharper. Sweat ran down the side of his face as he climbed the short hill leading to the mansion gates.

But the moment he reached the compound, what he saw made his blood run cold.

Elizabeth was standing right in the middle of the yard.

There, in front of her, was a large pile of his clothes, all thrown together in a heap on the ground.

She was holding a gas can in one hand. The clothes were already soaked in fuel, and in her other hand, she held a lighter, the flame was already

out dangerously close to the fabric.

Ryan's body froze. His heartbeat skipped a beat. His eyes widened in horror.

"No... Elizabeth," he whispered.

But it got worse. He saw something that took his attention from Elizabeth instantly.

Just a few feet away from Elizabeth, Ryan saw Julian, Elizabeth's Fiance. He was crouched beside the pile with something large and rectangular in his hand.

It was Ryan's old laptop.

Julian held it with both hands, then bent down and set it firmly on the ground, right against the edge of a solid concrete floor. He looked around briefly, like he was picking the perfect spot. 1

Then, he stepped back slightly.

Ryan's eyes widened.

Julian raised his leg slowly, positioning it over the laptop. His foot hovered there, looking ready.

One stomp, and it would all be over.

Ryan's mouth dropped open. His chest tightened as panic rushed through him.

That laptop held everything.

His files. His Nova account. His only proof.

And now—it was just one second away from being crushed.

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