

### Chapter 24

Ryan stood in front of the mirror, struggling with the tie that hung awkwardly around his neck. Sweat had already gathered at his hairline, and his palms were clammy. The meeting was just thirty minutes away, and the pressure weighed heavily on him.

Claudia had been standing there assisting him with other things. She noticed how he was struggling and smiled lightly.

"Boss, let me help you with that," Claudia said gently, stepping closer. Her tone was calm, and her smile was reassuring as she reached up to adjust the tie.

Ryan sighed wondering about how he could get this over and done with. "Isn't there any way I can just... wear what I'm used to? I know that it is an important business meeting, and it is only expected to wear a suit, but..." He looked at her through the mirror. "I've never worn a suit in my life. I feel like I'm choking. It doesn't feel comfortable and I feel it would take some time to get used to it."

Claudia chuckled softly. "I know it feels strange, but you'll adjust. With time, you'll walk into meetings like this with confidence. I'm here to guide you through it. It is going to be tough at first, but it is achievable."

She laid a hand softly on his shoulder, grounding him. For a brief moment, Ryan stared at her reflection, at how composed and kind she always was. He couldn't help but whisper, "You're beautiful, you know that?"

Claudia smiled, lowering her gaze. "Thank you, Boss."

He took another deep breath. "But... I think wearing a suit today might just mess up my nerves more. I need to feel comfortable to think straight.

I don't feel confident going to such a place with clothes I have never worn before."

Claudia nodded. "Alright. I'll get you something more casual. You have a lot of new casual clothes in your closet. You will like them. They are simple."

She stepped away and brought out a fresh set of designer T-shirt and jeans from the Ricco store. It was still high-class, just more of Ryan's style.

When he changed and turned to her, she gave a pleased nod. "Now you look like someone about to own the room."

"That's more like it," Ryan said.

"Let's hope I survive it first," Ryan muttered under his breath.

They both walked out to the car. Ryan chose the Maybach again, and Claudia drove them away from the mansion.

When they arrived at Nova headquarters, Ryan's stomach twisted into knots at the sight of the towering glass building. He had never seen any structure that tall and expensive. It was so huge he wondered how many offices would possibly be contained in it.

Claudia adjusted her purse. "I'll head in and get things ready. Are you okay?"

Ryan's phone buzzed at that instant before he could respond to her. He saw a missed call from Dr. Jerry.

He smiled faintly. "I think my mother is awake. I'll just call him real quick and meet you inside. At least for him to know I would be there once I am done with the meeting."



Claudia nodded and walked ahead to go into the building without Ryan.

Ryan turned away to a quiet corner to return the call, but as he turned abruptly, his foot collided with something. Looking down, he noticed it was a janitor's bucket, half-filled with dirty water, with a mop leaning out of it.

Ryan groaned. "Seriously? Right in the middle of road? Who put this here? I must be one of the workers at Nova."

He reached down and picked it up, deciding to move it out of the way so no one else would trip.

But as he walked toward the corner of the building with the mop bucket in his hand, a silver Nissan Versa pulled into the driveway where he was walking out of.

His body went still the moment he saw the car approaching. He knew that car, he knew the people who were inside the car.

Matthew and Jessica. It was the same car they used in splashing water on him yesterday.

The car parked in front of him, almost as if they wanted to hit him, and the doors opened.

Jessica stepped out, spotting Ryan immediately. Her face broke into a wide, mocking smile.

She jabbed Matthew on the arm and whispered something. Matthew turned, and when he saw Ryan holding the mop bucket, he erupted into laughter.

"Oh my God," Matthew said loud enough for everyone nearby to hear. "Would you look at that? The latest janitor in town."

Jessica covered her nose dramatically. "Ugh, the smell of bleach and failure," she said, stepping forward in her high heels.

She looked Ryan up and down and scoffed. "So this is the job you could afford after five whole years? Really, Ryan? Matthew and I just secured positions as secretaries to the new CEO of Nova. We're getting top-level work at Nova... and you're here, cleaning toilets for the same company?"

Ryan straightened slowly and placed the mop bucket gently on the ground. He stared at them without emotion, but inside, his blood boiled.

Jessica wasn't done, she clapped her hand while laughing.

"I mean, seriously," she continued. "You always had this stupid pride like you were going to be somebody. Turns out, you're just the help. Mopping floors, probably living in the basement."

Matthew laughed even louder, slapping the side of the car. "This is classic! You made so much noise back in school. Remember when you said Jessica would regret leaving you? And now look—she's the secretary to the new CEO, and you're the janitor outside!"

Ryan said nothing. He just looked at them.

His silence only encouraged them.

"You should apply for an internal transfer," Jessica said mockingly. "Maybe you'll get promoted from janitor to restroom supervisor."

Ryan exhaled deeply, clenched his jaw, and kept calm.

Jessica curled her lip and turned to Matthew. "Let's not be late for our meeting. We don't want the actual staff to mistake us for the cleaning crew."

Ryan watched as they walked past him, laughing loudly, bumping into people who were beginning to stare.

He looked down at his clean, neat and simple clothes. Nothing that screamed janitor. But none of that mattered to them. They were too blind, too caught up in their own arrogance.

He nodded at the thought of what Jessica had said.

He picked up the mop bucket again and placed it back where it belonged —against the cleaner's station near the side of the building.

Then, he stood straight, fixed his shirt, and walked inside the Nova building, taking the same steps Jessica and Matthew had just climbed.

But unlike them... he wasn't heading to meet the CEO.

He was the CEO there were going to be meeting in a few minutes time.

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