Chapter 28

Ryan's face didn't change. His eyes studied her. He didn't even blink. He felt so embarrassed on her behalf, because he could see through her lies.

Jessica swallowed hard. She looked smaller now, like a child begging for forgiveness. "Matthew was never half the man you were, Ryan," she whispered. "You were kind, thoughtful, and sweet. I was stupid. I let money and pressure blind me. But now I see—"

"Jessica," a voice cut in coldly from behind.

It was Matthew.

He took a step forward, his fists clenched by his sides. His jaw was tightened.

He looked at her in shock. "Are you... are you denying me? Right here? Right now?"

Jessica turned her head toward him slowly, as if waking up from a trance. Their eyes locked. And then, without warning, she stood up and slapped him hard.

SLAPP!!

A sharp smack echoed through the room.

Everyone flinched. Even Claudia blinked.

Matthew clutched his cheek, his jaw hanging open in disbelief. The redness of the slap Showed on his skin instantly.

"You!" Jessica barked, pointing at him, her chest rising and falling rapidly. "You're the reason I lost a good man! You manipulated me,

pressured me to hurt him! You lied about everything!"

Matthew stumbled back a step. "What?" he gasped, looking confused and infuriated. "When did I ever threaten you? You were the one who said Ryan wasn't good enough! You said you wanted a man who could give you everything. You chased me, Jessica!"

"Oh, please!" she snapped. "You knew I was vulnerable! You took advantage of that!"

"I proposed to you!" Matthew shouted, his voice cracking. "And you said yes! We planned a wedding!" 1

"Because I thought you were better than Ryan," she hissed. "But guess what? You're not. You never were. Not even close."

Matthew looked at her like he didn't know who she was anymore. His lips moved, but no sound came out.

"You're unbelievable," he finally said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Jessica turned back to Ryan. Her voice softened. With her lips trembling again, she spoke. "Ryan... please... I'm sorry. I was wrong. Just... give me one more chance. I'll do anything. I could be that girl you wanted me to be, I can be more. I would love you with everything."

The room went quiet again. Ryan finally rose from his seat.

His presence was commanding. Every eye followed him as he stepped forward.

He looked Jessica in the eye.

"You said I couldn't even buy you lunch," he said slowly. "You laughed when I walked the streets with muddy jeans. You threw my past in my

face."

Jessica looked down, guilt weighing down her spine.

"And now," Ryan continued, "that I'm not the man you thought I was... suddenly I'm worth chasing again?"

Jessica didn't answer. She couldn't.

"Let me be clear," Ryan said. "I don't hold a grudge because of the past. I hold a lesson. And you? You're the reminder of everything I had to overcome."

He stepped back slightly and motioned toward the door.

"Join your boyfriend. And please... stop embarrassing yourself."

Jessica blinked rapidly, trying to process the rejection. Her hands fell limply by her sides. Her legs felt numb.

Matthew was already at the door, his face red in anger and humiliation, feeling rejected by Jessica because of her rich Ex, Ryan. He didn't look back this time. He stormed out like a wounded animal, his pride was shattered.

Jessica remained a moment longer, her mind in deep regret. She stared at Ryan as though he'd taken the last piece of her dignity and walked away with it.

But Ryan was already sitting back down, not sparing her another glance.

The finality of it hit her. She had lost a man whose future was more than ten times brighter than Matthew's.

Claudia walked over and gently placed a hand on Jessica's arm. "It's time

to go," she said simply.

Jessica nodded slowly, her mouth quivering. With her shoulders slumped, she turned, heels clicking hollowly on the floor as she walked out of the room in shame.