

Chapter 5

Ryan stood just outside the hospital, staring down at his phone. The message from Elizabeth was still on his screen. He read it again.

He frowned slightly, his thumb hovering over the screen. It didn't make any sense.

"How about I get to the bottom of this?" he muttered, staring at screen.

Ryan wasn't sure what her game was, but one thing was clear—this wasn't coming from a place of love or remorse. She was planning something, and he intended to find out what.

He slipped his phone into his pocket and turned away from the hospital entrance. He made up his mind to go to the party, but not because he wanted her forgiveness. He wanted to see for himself what Elizabeth was trying to pull.

"I have to get changed into something different," he muttered as he took a cab.

When Ryan got home and entered his room, he opened his closet and stared at the clothes hanging inside. Every shirt looked tired and faded. Most of the clothes were over three years old, the kind he had worn since moving into the McCarthy estate.

The fabric was thinning, the collars were wrinkled, and none of it looked like something anyone would wear to a luxury birthday party.

He pulled out one of the better-looking shirts and held it up to the light. There was a small hole forming near the sleeve. He folded it back and shook his head.

"I have to get something new," he said to himself as he dropped the clothes back in the closet.

After a moment of thought, he made a decision. He needed something clean at least.

He needed to go to Ricco, the most high-end designer store in the city.

Ricco was located in the heart of the luxury district. The store was known for dressing celebrities, CEOs, and billionaires. Its entrance alone was intimidating—large glass doors, gold-trimmed windows, and a glowing logo above the building that made it look more like a private club than a clothing store.

Ryan stepped inside, feeling a little out of place at first. Everything about Ricco screamed wealth. The lighting was harsh, making each item on display stand out.

He took a few steps in and looked around, spotting a dark gray designer jacket on a mannequin that caught his eye.

"Nice," he murmured as he walked towards it.

But before he could go any closer, a woman in a sharp black pantsuit appeared in front of him. Her hair was pulled into a tight bun, and her heels clicked sharply against the floor, looking too professional.

She looked him over from head to toe, then gave a little laugh.

"And who are you?" She asked sharply, folding her hands to her chest. "You must have missed your way. You are at Ricco Store, are you aware of that?"

Ryan puffed jokingly, wondering why the woman looked too serious.

"Yes, I know this is Ricco Store. I read the sign before walking in," he said, stretching his hand to shake her, but she stepped back like Ryan's hand carried disease.

"We're not hiring cleaners today," she said with a sarcastic smile.

Ryan glanced at her, a bit surprised by how quickly she made that assumption. "I'm.. I'm not here for a job, neither am I here to clean," he replied calmly. "I came to shop. I need new clothes."

The woman's smile faded, replaced by a look of disbelief. She folded her arms across her chest and shook her head.

"This isn't a thrift store," she said. "The cheapest thing in here costs ten thousand dollars. You might want to try one of those shops across town. They'd be more in your budget."

Ryan didn't respond. He walked over to the mannequin and looked at the jacket again. It was stylish, cleanly cut, and probably expensive—but he liked it.

"How much is this jacket?" he asked, turning slightly to look at her.

The woman laughed again, louder this time. "You're serious? That jacket is thirty-two thousand dollars. You've probably never held even five thousand dollars in your life."

Ryan didn't say anything. He just scoffed, trying to brush the insult off.

He reached out to touch the fabric lightly, just to feel the material. But before his fingers even made contact, the woman's voice rang out loudly across the store.

"Hey! Don't touch that!" she shouted.

She quickly turned her head and yelled toward the front of the store, "Security!"

Within seconds, a security guard rushed in from the side. Ryan stepped back, confused.

"What's going on?" he asked.

The woman pointed at him. "He tried to grab the Lucas Capitelli jacket, worth thirty-two thousand dollars. I think he was trying to steal it. He walked in here acting like a customer, but he's clearly not."

The huge guard grabbed Ryan by the arm while he stepped closer, watching him closely. "Sir, we're going to have to ask you to leave immediately."

"I didn't do anything," Ryan said firmly. "I asked for the price and looked at the jacket. That's all."

The saleswoman scoffed. "He's lying. I saw him reaching for it, ready to run."

"I wasn't going anywhere," Ryan said. "You're making a mistake, I'm not a thief."

The guards didn't loosen his grip.

A man in a gray suit with a Ricco name badge stepped out from the back. He was clearly the manager. He looked between Ryan and the saleswoman and didn't even bother asking questions.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"This man came in here pretending to shop and then tried to grab one of the jackets," the woman said quickly. "I stopped him just in time. He doesn't belong here, take a look at him Sir. This person is from the slums."

The manager gave Ryan a quick glance, noticed his worn-out clothes, and frowned.

"Call the police," he told one of the guard without warning. "Let them sort it out. Truly, he looks like a thief. There's no way he can afford even a pair of socks here."

"I haven't stolen anything," Ryan said again. His tone was still calm, but firmer now. "I walked in here to buy a jacket. That's all. You don't have to call the police."

"No one's buying anything dressed like that," the manager said, pulling out his phone.

The security guard holding Ryan's arm tightened his grip a little. "Sir, don't resist."

"I'm not resisting," Ryan replied, meeting his gaze. "You're grabbing me for no reason."

Other customers in the store had started watching. A few whispered to each other. Someone took out their phone and began recording. The staff didn't seem to notice or care.

The manager tapped at his phone, ready to report a theft that hadn't even occurred. Ryan stood there, silently watching him.

"Hey, this doesn't have to go this far. I came to shop, I have the money to pay for the jacket," Ryan said, his voice strained, trying to make the man understand.

The man clicked his tongue in disgust. "Have you taken a look at the mirror? How could an obvious street rat like you afford a thirty-two thousand dollars Lucas Capitelli jacket?"

"Has poverty blocked your brains or something?" he said to Ryan.

Before Ryan could speak again, the manager placed the phone to his ear.

"Yes, Officer. I'm calling from Ricco S-Class Store. We have a theft case here. There's a man trying to steal from the store," he said to the phone.

Ryan's eyes widened. The manager really called the police.