Chapter 71

Ryan yanked hard against the thick arms restraining him, but it was no use. The two men holding him gripped his arms with an effortless strength that made him feel like a toy.

Every time he twisted or resisted, their hands tightened just enough to make him wince in pain.

"Let go of me!" he shouted, his voice reverberating through the corridor.

But Lord Ryder didn't so much as glance over her shoulder. She walked confidently ahead of them elegantly. She moved like she was on a runway and from a mere look, one would never know she was a devil.

"This is unnecessary!" Ryan growled, trying once more to break free.

Lord Ryder's voice was calm and dismissive. "Oh, sweetheart," she said without slowing her pace, "you haven't even seen unnecessary yet."

They turned one final corner and stopped in front of a large, black door. The hallway was colder here. The walls were made of grey stone, and the entire hallway was quieter here. This made Ryan's skin crawl. No one would hear anything down here, that was certain.

Without wasting time, Lord Ryder swiped a keycard across a panel beside the door. With a mechanical hiss, the door slid open, revealing a dark, windowless room. Inside was a single steel chair in the center of the floor. A large screen was mounted on one wall, blank and dark for now.

Lord Ryder finally turned to face him with a twisted smile spreading across her face. "This is the best room for you to stay in tonight," she said smoothly. "Mostly because no one will hear you scream when the show begins."

Before Ryan could respond, the two guards forced him into the chair. He thrashed, but they were stronger, and within seconds, his wrists were strapped down tightly. He grunted in frustration, his muscles straining against the restraints, but it was pointless.

Lord Ryder walked casually over to the control panel beside the screen and pressed a few buttons. The screen blinked to life, lighting up the room.

"Now," she said, her voice was filled with anticipation. "Sit tight... and watch."

Ryan's eyes widened as the screen lit up.

"Mom..." he whispered in disbelief.

The image showed a cell with very little light. Inside it, his mother stood shakily, looking pale and fragile. Her lips trembled as she tried to steady herself. Slowly, she moved toward a heavy metal door and began to pound on it with weak fists.

"Let me out!" she cried, but no sound came from the screen.

Ryan's heart pounded as he watched helplessly. The straps cut into his skin as he struggled again. "You really took her..." he said with a shaky voice.

Lord Ryder folded her arms and tilted her head slightly. "Yes, I did," she said without remorse. "And she's going to help me kill two birds with one stone."

Ryan's anger rose. "Why? Why her? She's done nothing to you!"

"That's exactly it," Ryder replied coldly. "She's done nothing. But you? You're a little too important to bring in without bait."

"You're insane!" he snapped. "Let her go!"

Ryder stepped closer, lowering her face to his level. Her breath was cold on his skin. "Watch your tone, Ryan. Do you even know who I am?"

"I know you're a monster," he said through clenched teeth.

She let out a soft, cruel laugh. "I'm Lord Ryder, a Level Three boss. The kind of person your nightmares have nightmares about. You're going to learn how to beg, Ryan Walker. And when you do, maybe I'll listen.... Just Maybe." 1

Ryan's voice was hoarse from anger. "What do you want from me?"

Her expression shifted into something more calculating. "Nova," she said simply.

Ryan blinked, trying to process what she meant. "My position at Nova?"

Ryder nodded. "That entire empire, the influence and everything there is that you have been getting from Nova. I want it all, and you're going to hand it to me."

He shook his head in disbelief. "You think I'd just give it up like that?"

Her smile returned. "Oh, not just like that. But you will because of her."

She gestured toward the screen again. His mother had collapsed near the door, curling into herself as if trying to disappear.

"She has nothing to do with Nova!" Ryan growled. "She's not part of any of this." 1