

Chapter 8

"Well, after borrowing the clothes, he still doesn't seem to fit in. I mean, he can't even afford a decent suit," someone said loudly enough for everyone to hear.

Ryan stood quietly with his hands at his sides, scanning the crowd with a calm expression. No one defended him. Not a single person said a word—not even her parents.

The embarrassment hit him hard, and now it was out in the open for everyone to see.

He remained frozen on the stage, struggling to make sense of what was happening. The noise from the crowd felt distant, like it was coming from far away. He had expected Elizabeth to do something unusual, but this felt like a planned attack.

"The worse thing is... even if you had to borrow, why these cheap set of clothes?" Elizabeth said, looking at his outfit with lack of interest.

Before he could collect his thoughts, Elizabeth's parents stepped forward and stood proudly beside her there on the stage, wearing an overconfident look on their faces.

Then a tall man in a grey suit walked up to join them. He moved confidently, as if he owned the room.

Ryan recognized him right away. It was no one else but Elizabeth's Ex-lover, Julian. The same Julian Elizabeth had said was in her past, the man that once abandoned her for a model. This was the man she had used 300,000 dollars to surprise, while Ryan's mother was struggling with her life in the hospital.

Julian walked straight to Elizabeth and wrapped an arm around her waist like he owned her body. He looked Ryan over from head to toe and laughed so hard.

"I am so sorry we have to bring you up here to show you this. I mean, I understand you are going through a lot concerning your wretched mother," he said, pretending to be having some sort of sympathy. "But wait... Wow. I didn't realize your standards had sunk this low. Come on, Liz, you stooped so low to marry a street rat like this, just because I was away?"

A few guests laughed along with him. Others whispered, as if they felt sorry for Elizabeth. Ryan didn't move. His hands curled into fists, but he stayed silent. His face gave nothing away. He had learned how to hold his pain.

Julian wasn't finished.

"Let's be honest," he said, addressing the crowd now. "Elizabeth only married this guy because I was overseas. She needed someone to keep the bed warm. But now I'm back and I'm taking her back."

Before Ryan could react, Elizabeth shoved a brown envelope against his chest. The push was rough, unexpected. The envelope slipped from his hands, and papers spilled out onto the floor. Slowly, he crouched to pick them up. At first, he didn't understand what he was holding until he saw the printed invitation.

"You are cordially invited to the engagement celebration of Julian Knight and Elizabeth McCarthy."

His eyes furrowed, but he didn't show his shock. The words didn't make sense. An engagement party? This whole event had been a setup. She had brought him here just to tear him apart in front of everyone. To end their marriage with maximum humiliation, it was an engagement party and not just a birthday party.

Then he saw the second document.

The second document was divorce papers, already signed by Elizabeth.

The message couldn't have been clearer. She was done with him legally, emotionally, and socially. And she wanted the entire world to see it as she dumped him.

Ryan rose to his feet, the papers still in his hand. The room had grown silent, waiting to see how he'd respond. Elizabeth took a step closer, her voice soft but loud enough for people nearby to hear.

"You should be begging me right now," she said emotionlessly. "You need me. Don't forget, your mother is dying, and you have nothing. No savings. No connections. No hope without me. Without my help, she won't even make it through tomorrow." Elizabeth's voice said in a cold whisper to his face.

She thought she had power over him. She didn't know he had already paid for the surgery. That the hospital bill was settled. That she had no hold over him anymore.

But she kept going.

"I've been generous, Ryan. So patient. But if you dare act proud here like divorcing me means nothing to you, I'll call the hospital myself and make sure your mother's name disappears from their system. Let's see if your pride can keep her alive," her threat was cold.

She had brought him here to humiliate him. She wanted Ryan to fall to his knees like a weakling and beg her not to divorce him, so that she could end up divorcing him anyway after watching him humiliate himself by begging in front of everybody.

She turned to face the audience.

"Look at him," she said, with a cold voice. "This is what I had to deal with. A man with broken shoes and empty pockets. I gave him a life. I gave him status. And now that Julian's back—the man I truly love—it's time to let go of my charity case."

Her mother stepped forward, with her voice full of mockery. "We really tried to help him. We let him into our family, gave him a place to live, food to eat. And what did we get in return? Disgrace for letting our daughter marry a man from the slums."

Her father joined in with a cold shrug. "It was always charity. He was never our choice for Elizabeth. A man like that doesn't belong in our world."

Elizabeth turned back to Ryan, her eyes glowing with cold satisfaction. "So," she said, her voice like a blade, "are you going to stand there all night? Or are you finally going to cry and beg like I know you want to?"

Ryan didn't say a word. He looked down at the divorce papers, took a breath, and looked her in the eye.

"Give me a pen," he said calmly.

The crowd fell silent.

Elizabeth blinked, confused. "What did you just say?"

"I said," Ryan repeated calmly, "give me a pen."

No anger. No begging. Elizabeth was shocked to her bones.

The whole plan for humiliation wouldn't be complete if Ryan easily signed the divorce paper like he didn't care. She wanted him to beg, hold her feet and cry like a baby, so that the crowd would watch and mock him, then she would divorce him, leaving him broken.

But Ryan didn't beg.

A guest near the front hesitated, then stepped forward and handed him a pen. Ryan nodded, took it, and walked over to the small table nearby. He set the papers down and signed them without pause or hesitation, shocking everyone who thought he would beg.

When he was done, he capped the pen, placed it beside the papers, and handed them back to Elizabeth without saying a word.

She stared at him, unsure how to react. This wasn't how she planned it. He was supposed to fall apart. He was supposed to fall on his knees and plead. But instead, he signed it causally like he wasn't bothered.

Elizabeth scoffed, smiling coldly as she regained her composure. "Trying to act tough, are you? Watch this, I'll call the hospital right now and have your mother discharged. I have enough power and influence that, with just one call, no hospital in this city would dare admit her. She will suffer and die in the street where you both belong."

Elizabeth's face became icy immediately.

Ryan lifted his head from the floor, with his brows drawn together calmly.

"You really think you have more influence than me?" he asked calmly. "What gave you that idea, Elizabeth?"

The room erupted in laughter. Everyone thought Ryan was joking—after all, he was poor. How could he possibly compete with the daughter of a billionaire in terms of who had more influence and power?

Elizabeth huffed. "Clearly, poverty has rotted your brain. Besides my family's wealth, I have Julian. Do you even know who he is? He's the personal assistant to the Director of Finance at Nova Inc. Anyone connected to who he is? He's the person who is worshipped. With his position at Nova, he is known and respected by all most everyone in town because he is so close to the Director of Finance at the company."

Ryan tried not to laugh, but he was clearly amused. If only Elizabeth knew the truth. He was now the CEO of Nova—the highest position in the company.

Elizabeth's voice rose coldly. "Watch your mother die in the hospital corridor after I make this phone call," she said, quickly dialing a number on her phone.