

Chapter 86

"I'm fine," she muttered.

He stepped closer, placing a hand on her shoulder calmly and she shifted backwards a bit like she was being cautious of strangers. "You don't look fine, Did something happen? Maybe I could help..."

"No, you can't... no one can't," she sobbed, and with every word she tried to say out, she sobs harder.

She let out a humourless laugh as she wiped her cheek with the back of her hand. "It's nothing, just... humiliation, I guess."

Ryan raised his head slightly as he became curious by what the girl just mentioned. "You want to talk about it?"

She hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"I... I tried to attend the party," she said quietly as she gestured toward the building, and then she shook her head. "Elizabeth McCarthy's birthday."

Ryan raised an eyebrow. "You were invited?"

"No," she admitted. "But guests were entering, and I thought maybe I could just slip in. I wasn't going to cause trouble. I just wanted to feel happy today. It's my birthday too, you know and I have absolutely nothing to celebrate with, not even one bottle of wine."

His expression softened as he listened to her. "Your birthday?"

She nodded. "Yeah. I was born on the same day as her, and for years, Elizabeth McCarthy has been my role model, I never knew she was this harsh on people because I only see her from a distance. Since today was



also my birthday I just wanted to see everything and feel happy. When guests started going in, I thought I could enter too."

She sniffed. "But when she saw me, she walked up to me herself, looked me up and down, and said I was dirty. She slapped me and told me to celebrate my birthday in the streets, where people like me belong."

Her voice cracked, and all of a sudden, she burst down in tears all over again.

Ryan stared at her in disbelief. "She did that, Elizabeth slapped you because you tried to enter without planning to cause any issue? If she didn't want you there, she could have had you escorted out by the security like a sensible person would do."

She nodded. "Right in front of everyone. And then the guards pushed me out, so roughly I almost broke my ankle."

Ryan stepped closer, slowly raising a hand and gently wiping a tear off her cheek. "I know how that feels, to be humiliated by them, to be made to feel small. Believe me, I know."

She looked up at him. "Really?"

"Yes," Ryan said softly. "They hurt me too, you know? They tried to destroy my life but I didn't let them."

For a moment, she just stared at him, unsure whether to believe him.

"What's your name?" Ryan asked.

"Lena."

"Lena," he repeated gently. "So why did you come here, really? Just to see the party?"



She hesitated again. "I didn't have any plans for my birthday. I couldn't afford to celebrate. No cake, no food, no gifts, nothing. I just thought... maybe if I saw Elizabeth's party, I could imagine that part of it was for me too, at least I get to have a glass of wine."

Ryan smiled, but there was sadness in his eyes. "And instead, she gave you a slap."

Lena let out a weak laugh through her tears. "Yeah. Happy birthday to me, right?"

Ryan shook his head. "No! Not that... Elizabeth, she doesn't get to define your worth."

She sniffled. "It just hurts. I didn't want anything crazy. Just... a small celebration. Maybe a little food, something to drink. Maybe one or two people to say 'Happy Birthday.' I guess that was my dream birthday."

Ryan looked at her for a moment, then asked, "If you could celebrate anywhere in town, and I mean anywhere at all, even just for one night, where would you choose?"

Lena scoffed. "What's the point of wishing?"

"Humor me..."

She sighed. "I guess... APEX HALLS, the same place they kicked me out of, but it doesn't matter. Wishes don't come true, this isn't some fairytale. I can't even afford to walk into the cheapest restaurant, let alone book a place like this."

Ryan stared at her, then smiled.

"Then APEX HALLS it is."



She blinked. "What?"

"We'll celebrate your birthday here, tonight."

Lena chuckled bitterly through her tears. "You're sweet, but come on, we're just common people. People like us don't have that kind of power."

Ryan didn't reply immediately. He just gave a short laugh of his own.

