Chapter 9 No.9

The Sterling Foundation Charity Gala . The event of the season.

"I can't go," Elena panicked, looking at the invitation. "Victoria will be there. Everyone will be there."

"Exactly," Julian said. He was fastening cufflinks on a tuxedo shirt. "We are going to show them that we aren't broken"

He had hired a glam squad. She wore a midnight blue velvet gown that hugged every curve, with a slit up the leg. The pink diamond sparkled on her finger.

Julian wore a bespoke tuxedo that fit his broad shoulders perfectly . Even in the chair, he looked more powerful than any man in the room.

When they entered the ballroom, the music stopped. Literally . Everyone turned to stare.

Victoria marched over, looking like she had swallowed a lemon.

"You have some nerve showing up here," she hissed.

"It's a public charity, Victoria," Julian smiled. "I donated."

Ryan was there, drinking heavily. He kept glaring at them.

Miss Chen, sipping a glass of sparkling grape juice, stumbled past Elena. She "tripped," her glass flying toward Elena's dress.

Elena didn't move fast enough. But Julian did.

He spun his chair with lightning speed, blocking the splash with the back of his tuxedo jacket. The purple stain bloomed on his black wool.

"Oops," Miss Chen giggled.

"Check the security cameras," Julian said loudly to the room. "Assault is a crime."

Miss Chen paled and scurried away.

The orchestra started a waltz .

Ryan sauntered over. "Well, since Uncle can't dance, maybe I should give the bride a turn? For old times' sake?"

"I'd rather dance with a cactus," Elena said coldly.

"Come here, Elena," Julian said.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her to the center of the floor.

"Julian, what are you doing?" she whispered.

"Trust me."

He began to move. He held her hand firmly, anchoring her as she moved around him. He spun the wheelchair in time with the music, creating a pivot point for her steps. She stepped, he rolled. He pushed forward, she arched back. It was a dance of geometry and balance, relying on her movement to complement his stillness.

He lifted her hand, spinning her, then caught her by the waist. She leaned back, trusting his grip, creating a beautiful line against the dark metal of his chair.

The room erupted in applause.

Ryan stood on the sidelines, holding his drink, looking small and petty.

"You're amazing," Elena breathed, looking into Julian's eyes.

"You make me look good," he murmured.

They left early, like royalty exiting their court.

But the moment the car doors closed, Julian groaned. He doubled over, clutching his legs.

"Julian!" she screamed. "What is it?"

"Nerve pain," he gasped, sweat popping out on his forehead. "The movement... it triggered it."

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry," she cried. "You did that for me."

"Worth it," he gritted out. "To see you smile? Worth every second."

She held him all the way home, her heart breaking for this man who gave her everything at the cost of his own pain.