



Chapter 118

Ryan and Claudia stepped out together from Nova Headquarters.

His hand was resting lightly on her back, as they walked towards the Maybach...

The driver had already opened the back door, waiting for them to get in.

Ryan was in good spirits, or at least as good as he could be after the exhausting interaction with Elizabeth and Julian.

"So, it is finally over then. I mean your ex-wife and her fiance," Claudia said with a smile at one corner of her lips.

"Well," Ryan said with a faint smile, "that is one mess off my desk. They've finally seen the truth for themselves, and from now on there will be no more hiding, no more pretending."

Claudia nodded but didn't respond. Her steps were slower than usual, her gaze fixed somewhere far ahead, as though her mind had been left behind in another place entirely.

Ryan noticed the change in her attitude immediately. Claudia wasn't looking like herself. He felt something was wrong instantly.

Her lips were pressed into a thin line, and there was a heaviness in her eyes he hadn't seen before.

He stopped beside the car door, holding it open but not stepping in. "Claudia," he said softly, placing a hand on her shoulder. "What is it?"

She blinked, startled as if he had pulled her from a deep thought. "What? Sorry I uhh..."



"You just went from here..." he gestured. "Your thoughts took you somewhere far away. I know that look, Claudia... something's bothering you."

She hesitated, offering a small, forced smile. "It's nothing... Really."

Ryan arched his brow. "We both know that's not true."

Claudia exhaled slowly, her gaze dropping to the ground. "I just... didn't want to bring it up, not today. You've already had enough to deal with."

"Claudia," Ryan said gently, "don't do that. Don't decide for me what I can or can't handle. If something's weighing on you, I want to know. Whatever it is, we'll deal with it together."

Her fingers toyed nervously with the strap of her handbag. "It's not that simple."

"Then make it simple," he urged, his voice lowering a bit. "Start from the beginning."

For a long moment, she didn't move. Her lips parted slightly as though she was going to speak, but then she closed them again.

Ryan watched her wrestle with herself, the silence was still between them.

Finally, she let out a slow breath...

"Alright," she murmured. "But... please don't look at me differently after I tell you this."

"I can't promise I won't feel something," Ryan replied honestly. "But I can promise I won't walk away."



Her throat bobbed as she swallowed. "Ryan... I was married before."

Ryan froze. The words hit harder than he expected. He straightened slightly, blinking at her as if to make sure he'd heard correctly. "You were ... married?"

She nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. "Yes."

His brows furrowed in disbelief. "How come you never told me?"

"I didn't think it mattered anymore," she admitted, her voice trembling slightly. "It was... years ago. And it didn't last. Only three months."

He stared at her, trying to process the idea. "Three months? What happened?"

Claudia took a step closer to him, as though needing his presence to keep going. "I divorced him."

Ryan's jaw tightened. "Why?"

Her gaze moved away from him. "Because... he cheated on me. And he was abusive."

At that, Ryan's expression darkened. His voice was low, controlled, but there was clear anger to it. "Are you telling me he hit you?"

"Yes," she said simply, her tone carrying the weight of something she didn't want to relive. "And worse. He made me feel small and powerless. I walked out before it could destroy me."

Ryan's hands curled slightly at his sides. "If that's the truth—"