

Chapter 119

"It is the truth," she cut in quickly, her voice cracking.

He inhaled slowly, grounding himself before he spoke again. "If that's the truth, then I'm glad you left him. You did what you had to do. So... why does this feel like something bigger? You're divorced, he's out of your life... or at least he should be. What's the problem now?"

Her eyes darted around as though checking who might be listening, even though the parking area was empty. "That's... the part I've been afraid to tell you."

Ryan's brows knitted together. "Afraid to tell me?"

She nodded, her lips trembling slightly before she spoke again. "You know the business trip I told you I went on last month?"

"Yes," Ryan replied cautiously.

Her voice dropped lower. "It wasn't a business trip."

Ryan's jaw tightened instantly, as he was becoming suspicious. "Then what was it?"

Claudia hesitated, biting down on her lower lip. She was visibly struggling with the words.

"Claudia," Ryan said evenly, "just tell me the truth."

She looked up at him then, her eyes filled with shame and fear. "I went to see Bobby."

The name meant nothing to him at first, until she added, almost in a whisper, "My ex-husband."



Ryan's expression went completely still. "You... went to see him?"

"Yes," she admitted quickly, "but not for the reason you think. I didn't go there because I wanted to. I went because—"

"Why?" Ryan pressed, his tone was serious but not angry.

Claudia's voice shook a bit. "Because he threatened me. He told me... that if I didn't come to see him, he would ruin me. He said he would destroy my reputation, drag my name through every gutter he could find. He said he would make sure I could never work in this industry again."

Ryan's eyes narrowed, the anger starting to show in his expression. "So you went. Alone."

"Yes," she whispered. "I thought... if I just went, I could get him to back off. But I didn't tell you because... I didn't want you to get involved. I didn't want you to think I was still tied to him somehow. I didn't want you to see me in a different light."

Ryan studied her for a long moment, his gaze dropping for a while before raising it again. "Claudia... the problem isn't that you went. The problem is that you didn't tell me. You've been carrying this alone while I was right here."

She blinked rapidly, fighting the tears. "I didn't want to add to your burdens. You've been dealing with enough already, the takeover, the board, Elizabeth and Julian..."

He shook his head slowly. "You don't get to decide that for me. If you're in trouble, I need to know..."

Her voice cracked as she whispered, "I'm sorry."

Ryan's tone softened slightly, though the anger remained. "Don't be



sorry. Just... be honest next time, no matter what it is."

Claudia nodded, her shoulders sagging in relief that the truth was finally out.

Ryan didn't move for a moment, he just stood there, staring into the distance with his jaw clenched.

"Bobby's not going to threaten you again," he said.

She looked up at him, startled. "Ryan..."

"I mean it," he said firmly. "If he tries, I'll make sure he regrets it, permanently."

Claudia swallowed hard, knowing from the tone in his voice that he wasn't making an empty promise.

"You.. you don't understand how deep this is," she said anxiously.

Ryan finally stepped back, gesturing for her to get into the car. "Come on ... We're going home. And then you're going to tell me everything he said to you, word for word."

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