

Chapter 124

His arm was still around Claudia, her face pressed against his chest, but his mind was already at Nova headquarters.

His mind wandered around everything and then finally back to the message Lord Ryder had dropped earlier.

He pulled back slightly from the embrace, his hands still resting lightly on her arms.

His eyes met her eyes. "Claudia," he said calmly, "I have to go. My secretary just called and there are people waiting for me at Nova headquarters. She said it was urgent."

Claudia's brows furrowed. Her voice was still shaky. "You're... you're leaving now?"

"I don't want to," Ryan admitted, "but whatever this is, it might be connected to what Lord Ryder said earlier. I can't ignore it."

Her lips trembled, and fresh tears were about to spill out. "I can't just leave, Ryan... look at it... look at everything..."

Her gaze turned toward the flames. The Ricco S-Class Store, her pride, her sweat, her work all these years was now nothing but a wall of roaring fire.

Ryan followed her gaze, but his eyes softened. "Watching it burn isn't going to make it stop," he said gently. "Standing here isn't going to change the fact that it's gone."

She shook her head violently. "You don't understand. This isn't just a store to me, this is years of my life. This is—" Her voice broke, and she



covered her mouth with her hand.

"I do understand," Ryan interrupted, he said softly. "That's exactly why I'm telling you to leave it now. Let the fire crews handle this. I will personally make sure Bobby pays for every second of this. I will deal with him myself."

Her eyes snapped to his, unsure how to proceed from here with her life. "I want to stay here, Ryan. Just for a while."

He exhaled slowly, his jaw tightening. "Claudia, I'm not asking you to come with me because I think you need a ride. I'm asking because I don't want you standing here vulnerable when I'm not around. Whoever set this fire could still be close by."

She hesitated, her gaze darting between the burning building and him.

Ryan leaned closer, lowering his voice. "And there's something else you need to know."

Her eyes narrowed. "What?"

"I got a call from Lord Ryder before you called me."

The effect was immediate. Claudia froze, her breath catching in her throat. "Lord... Ryder?"

He nodded grimly. "Yes. She told me to check Nova headquarters. She didn't say much else — just that I'd find out soon enough."

Claudia's eyes widened in pure dread. She knew enough about Lord Ryder to understand that a casual phone call from her was never casual at all. Her voice came out in a whisper. "Ryan... if she called you... something's wrong."



"That's what I think too," he said. "And then, before I could even leave, my secretary called and said some people were already there asking for me. I can't ignore that."

For a moment, Claudia seemed confused, her body turning slightly toward the fire as if her heart was still chained to it. But then she exhaled shakily, her shoulders sinking. "Fine," she murmured. "I'll come with you."

Without another word, Ryan took her by the hand and led her back toward the Maybach. The crowd parted for them as the driver stepped forward to open the door.

The moment they were inside, Ryan gave a single order. "Nova headquarters, be fast."

The driver nodded and started the car.

The ride was quiet for the first few minutes. Claudia sat staring out the tinted window.

Ryan watched her from the corner of his eye, his mind was split between her pain and the unknown situation awaiting him at Nova.

Finally, she spoke. "If this is connected to Bobby..."

"It might be," Ryan said evenly, "but it also might be something else entirely. Lord Ryder doesn't align herself with just anyone, but if she's stirring things at Nova, she's either doing it herself or she's working through someone else."

Claudia's hand tightened on her lap. "She's dangerous."

Ryan gave a short nod. "I know."



They didn't speak much more after that. The silence wasn't comfortable.

When the Maybach finally arrived at to the headquarters, Ryan's face was twisted in confusion.

Even from inside the car, Ryan could see something unusual. The presence of three armed police officers stationed right outside the glass doors of Nova Inc.'s entrance.

And standing a little to the side of them was his secretary . a petite woman in a pencil skirt and her posture was stif.

Looking closely at her one could tell she was scared. She kept glancing toward the doors as if expecting him to appear any second.

Ryan's hand was already on the car door handle when he froze. His gaze swept over the scene again, every instinct in him heightening.

Armed officers waiting for him at his own company? That wasn't standard protocol for anything legitimate.

He pushed the door open slowly and stepped out.

From across the distance between them, the secretary spotted him and immediately straightened, feeling a bit relieved, but there was no mistaking the tension in her eyes.

The three officers turned toward him at once, their eyes tracking him carefully.

Claudia slid out of the car after him, her eyes darting to the officers, then to him.

She whispered, "Ryan... why are the police here?"



He didn't answer her right away. Instead, he took a few slow steps forward, his gaze was fixed on his secretary.

"What's going on?" he asked his secretary, but she she swallowed before answering.

She glanced nervously at the officers before speaking. "Sir... they're here to see you. They said it's... important. They said it's really urgent.."

One of the officers stepped forward slightly, his expression seemed professional. "Mr. Ryan Walker?"

Ryan's jaw tightened subtly. "That's me."

The officer nodded. "We need to speak with you now."

Ryan glanced briefly over his shoulder at Claudia, who was watching with worry and suspicion.

Then he turned back to the officer, "About what?"

The officer's gaze didn't change. "Inside, sir. We'll explain everything there, we ask that you take us to your office..."

Ryan didn't move at first. He simply studied the man for a moment, then looked at the other two officers, then back at his secretary. Something told him this wasn't going to be a good conversation.

Claudia stepped closer to Ryan and murmured. "Ryan... this doesn't feel right."

"No," Ryan agreed, his eyes narrowing slightly, "it doesn't."

And yet Ryan kept his face calm, he gestured toward the entrance. "



Alright... Let's go inside."

The officers moved toward the glass doors, and Ryan followed, but in his mind he knew something was wrong.

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