



Chapter 143

The restaurant was beginning to pack up.

Ryan sat calmly at his table, one hand resting lightly on his glass of water, as he set it down.

His eyes following Edna Franklin as she walked out of the restaurant with her designer, Iris.

Finally, he leaned back in his chair, his lips curving faintly into a smile.

"Claudia," Ryan said. "This partnership with Edna... it excites me. Selling McCarthy Technologies to her would have been a smart move, yes, and it would have brought me a great return. But what she just offered, it's far more valuable. This deal will open doors I didn't even plan to walk through yet."

Claudia looked at him, her own smile breaking out, she looked just as excited.

She leaned forward slightly, her elbows resting on the edge of the table.

"I agree," she said warmly. "Ryan, this is going to change everything for you. This isn't just profit, this is influence. With Edna by your side, even competitors won't dare breathe against you."

Ryan chuckled softly, sounding satisfied. "Exactly! People will talk about this night, Claudia. They'll talk about how Nova secured its place at the very top. And they'll remember you were there, standing with me when it happened."

Claudia smiled even wider at his words. They laughed gently, exchanging a brief look that carried comfort.



But then, as quickly as the joy had appeared, it was gone.


Claudia's phone rang, vibrating on the table. She glanced down at the screen, and Ryan noticed it instantly.

The smile on her lips ceased, her eyes darkened, and the glow on her face disappeared. Her fingers trembled slightly as she tapped the screen, and her jaw tightened.

Ryan leaned forward, his sharp gaze not missing a thing. "Claudia," he said softly, trying to catch her eyes. "What is it? You were smiling just now. What changed?"

Claudia's lips pressed together. She forced a quick smile, shaking her head almost too quickly. "It's nothing."

Ryan's eyes narrowed. He was not the type of man to be satisfied with surface answers.

He leaned closer to her and tried to grab her hand, "Claudia, don't do that with me. I can see it in your face. Tell me what's wrong." 

Her hands gripped her phone tightly. The tension in her was visible. For a moment, it looked like she might speak, but then she shook her head again, this time more forcefully.

"I said it's nothing, Ryan!" Her voice rose, sounding sharp and defensive. It was kind of harsh that it started drawing the attention of a few nearby diners who turned their heads briefly.

Silence fell between them. Claudia blinked, as though realizing she had just snapped at him. Her chest rose and fell as she took in a shaky breath. She quickly softened her tone, her eyes darting away from his.

"I'm sorry," she muttered, her voice lower now and sounding apologetic.



"I didn't mean to raise my voice. It's just... it's business, Ryan. Complicated business... Please don't press me about it."

Ryan studied her face for a long moment, his jaw tightening as he fought the urge to push further.

His instinct told him there was more, something she wasn't saying. But before he could ask again, Claudia abruptly stood up, grabbing her bag.

"I'll go home alone tonight," she said quickly, her tone sounding clipped. "I need to clear my head."

Ryan frowned, his eyes following her every movement. "Claudia..." he began, his voice was filled with concern.

But she didn't give him a chance to finish. She turned her back and walked swiftly toward the door. Within seconds, she was gone.

Ryan remained seated, staring at the empty space she had left behind. He became suspicious, believing it wasn't ordinary.

Something was wrong. He knew it. His instincts rarely failed him, and right now, they screamed at him to follow her.

After a few minutes of restlessness, Ryan stood up abruptly. He walked to the entrance of the restaurant and ordered a cab. Sliding into the back seat, he leaned forward to the driver and spoke.

"Follow that cab," he instructed, pointing in the direction Claudia's taxi had gone. "But keep your distance. Don't let them see us."

The driver glanced at him through the rearview mirror, startled by the seriousness in Ryan's tone, but he nodded quickly. "Yes, sir."

The cab pulled out onto the road, its headlights dimmed. Ryan leaned



back, his hand tapping against his knee in impatience. His mind ran through endless possibilities, but none of them were good.

The drive didn't take long. Within minutes, Claudia's cab slowed down and stopped in front of a tall building with a large glowing sign "Supreme Night Hotel."

Ryan's brows furrowed deeply. His heart thudded against his ribs as he watched Claudia step out of the cab. She paid the driver, looked around nervously, and then walked quickly toward the entrance of the hotel.

"Stop here," Ryan ordered his driver sharply.

The cab halted at the corner. Ryan slipped out quietly, keeping to the shadows as he followed Claudia at a distance.

Inside the hotel reception area, she barely glanced at anyone. She walked straight to the elevator and pressed the button with urgency. Ryan stayed behind a wall, his eyes were steadily on her.

When the elevator doors closed, he moved swiftly, taking the stairs two at a time.

By the time he reached the hallway of the fifth floor, his ears picked up the faint sound of her heels again. He crouched low, following quietly until she stopped in front of a door that was labeled Room 59.

Ryan's chest grew heavier. His eyes sharpened.

Claudia raised her hand and knocked twice on the door.

There was silence for a moment, and then the door opened slowly. Ryan pressed himself against the wall, hidden in the shadows.

And then he heard sounds.



A familiar voice. A voice that made his blood run hot with rage instantly.

"Claudia," the voice said hoarsely. "I thought you wouldn't come."

Ryan's eyes widened, and his jaw clenched so tightly that his teeth ground together. He knew that voice. He could never mistake it.

It was Bobby Greene...