



Chapter 144

Claudia's voice trembled, every word carrying fear she was trying so hard to conceal. Her hands fidgeted nervously at her sides, her knuckles brushing against each other.

"I'm here," she said shakily, her tone uncertain, almost pleading. "And yes, I came alone, just as you asked me to."

There was a pause, and Bobby looked behind Claudia very well to make sure she wasn't playing any tricks. He was suspicious quite alright, but he didn't see any signs of anybody following her because as at then, Ryan had already hidden behind the wall.

"I know very well, Ryan wouldn't let you walk out alone. He had been trying to carry out duties of a husband lately, isn't it?" he said, but Claudia's face was a frown and she didn't give him an answer. This angered Bobby, and his teeth clenched at her lack of response.

"Where is Ryan Walker?" His tone rose through his teeth. "Don't tell me he followed you here or waiting for you outside..."

Claudia gasped, shaking her head quickly, her words tumbling out in a rush, as though hesitation would cost her dearly. "He's still at the restaurant. L... I left him there. He asked, he asked where I was going to, but I told him it was business. I told him I needed to go home alone and he shouldn't wait for me. He didn't follow me... I swear it."

Ryan's jaw tightened where he stood by the wall. He stood so still it was as though he had merged with the shadows in the hallway. He heard how scared Claudia was while Bobby interrogated her.

"Good," Bobby muttered darkly, his voice was extremely harsh, close enough that Claudia could feel the heat of his breath on her skin. "



Because if he had followed you here, Claudia, I swear I would have torn him apart with my bare hands. But listen to me carefully..." His voice dropped lower, cold, and more dangerous, making Claudia's stomach knot.

"If you try to mess with me in any way, you'll regret it. You hear me? You were supposed to be my wife, Claudia, mine! And tonight..." he squeezed her neck tighter, his fingers digging into her skin, making her gasp and claw at his hand..."I called you here to entertain me as such."

Claudia's breath came out in panicked bursts. "B-Bobby, please... don't start this." She tried to push his hand off, but he only pressed harder. Her words shook from the desperation to escape him. "I want nothing to do with you anymore. Do you hear me? Nothing. I only came because... because you threatened to harm Ryan if I refused to come."

Bobby scoffed, an ugly, mocking sound that made Ryan's blood boil from where he stood.

"Oh, so you still care about him," Bobby said, his lip curling from the disgust he felt towards Ryan. "Of course you do. You think I don't see it in your eyes? You've always looked at him differently." He pulled back slightly, his grip loosening, only to grab her chin harshly, jerking her face up toward his. His thumb dug painfully into her cheek. "Then here's the deal, Claudia. Either you do as I say, or Ryan pays for it. I don't mind destroying him with my own hands. In fact, I'd enjoy it."

Claudia shook her head violently, tears forming behind her eyes, her breath hitching in broken sobs. Her words rushed out unrestrained. "No! Don't hurt him, Bobby. Please, I'm begging you. Don't touch him."

Bobby smirked, his grip loosening at last. He released her neck, letting her stumble backward, her shoulders jerking with each breath she sucked in.



"That's better," he muttered with satisfaction. "That's the Claudia I know, the one who listens when the stakes are high. Then listen to me now, Get inside!"

His tone hardened even more, his eyes cold and sharp. "Now!"

Claudia hesitated at the threshold, her hands trembling at her sides. Her eyes darted toward the hallway almost instinctively, though she had no idea Ryan was standing right there, hidden by the wall, watching every moment with anger in his eyes.

Her hesitation lasted only a moment before Bobby's voice thundered again, sounding sharp and merciless.

"Inside!" he barked, his teeth clenched.

Claudia flinched at the force of his tone, her heart hammering painfully in her chest. With stiff, reluctant steps, she walked past him and into the hotel room.

Ryan pressed closer to the wall, his breath controlled, his body rigid with the effort it took not to burst through the door. His fists flexed at his sides, and his nails dug into his palms. Every part of him was eager to intervene, but he forced himself to stay still. Timing mattered.

Once Claudia stepped fully inside, Bobby closed the door and locked it from the inside.

"Sit," he commanded coldly, pointing at the chair placed like a prop in the middle of the room.

Claudia obeyed without a word. Her body was stiff, her back straight as she lowered herself onto the chair. Her hands clutched tightly in her lap as though holding herself together. Her eyes darted briefly to Bobby



before she quickly looked away, afraid of provoking him further.

Bobby strolled slowly across the room. He picked up a bottle from the counter, poured a glass of dark liquid, and set it down on the table before her.

"Take it," he ordered flatly. "It'll help you relax."

Claudia's eyes lingered on the glass. She shook her head firmly. "No. I don't want it."

Bobby leaned closer, his face only inches from hers. She could smell the bitter tang of alcohol already clinging to his breath. His voice was low and dangerous as he repeated the command.

"Claudia, don't push me. Take the drink."

She swallowed hard. Her hands twisted together in her lap, but she refused to give in to his demand. Her voice came out soft, barely above a whisper. "I told you, Bobby. I want nothing to do with you. I didn't come here to drink with you, or to sit here like your wife. I came here because I don't want Ryan hurt. That's all."