

Chapter 29

Ryan stepped out of the Nova Headquarters building, the tall glass doors closing behind him.

Claudia walked beside him as they approached the Maybach.

She glanced at him with a pleased smile. "Congratulations, Sir," she said with a warm voice. "You performed exceptionally well in the meeting today. The board is already talking about how confident and strategic you were."

Ryan smiled lightly as he felt a bit relieved and proud. "Thanks," he said. "I just did what I could."

As they approached the car, Ryan was just about to reach for the door handle when they both heard hurried footsteps from behind them. The sound came fast and hurried, like someone running out of nervousness.

Ryan turned slightly, and Claudia followed his gaze.

Julian Knight came into view, almost jogging toward them, dressed in a wrinkled designer shirt soaked in sweat. His tie was crooked, and he looked more disheveled than usual. His forehead was covered in sweat, his eyes darting to and fro with panic. The moment he spotted Claudia, a wide grin broke out on his face, one of false relief and desperation.

"Thank God," Julian panted, slowing his steps as he reached them. "Ms. Duval! I've been trying to reach you all morning. You've got no idea how lucky I am to meet you here!"

Claudia blinked, her brows raised in confusion. "Really?" she said slowly.

Julian turned to Ryan, now noticing the man standing beside her. Instantly, his face twisted in distaste. He looked Ryan from head to toe

severally times and clicked his tongue.

"What the hell is this guy doing here?" Julian asked, his lip curling in anger. "Why are you even with him? Do you even know who this man is?"

Ryan didn't flinch, but Claudia's face immediately darkened especially because of how Julian had spoken about Ryan.

"I suggest you speak respectfully," Claudia said calmly. "Why would you say such?".

Julian let out a short, mocking laugh. "Respectfully? To this fool?" He gestured dismissively at Ryan. "Come on, Claudia. This nobody doesn't even know the meaning of the word 'respect'. He's useless. And I mean it, even his own wife, my fiancée, dumped him because he was a pathetic failure."

Claudia's jaw clenched. She wanted to speak up, to tell Julian exactly who he was standing next to, but something held her back. She glanced at Ryan briefly, and he gave her a small, subtle nod. His hand lightly patted her back, and at that moment, she knew he didn't want him too spill it.

Julian didn't notice the signal that Ryan gave her. He was too busy gloating.

Ryan took a step back and leaned casually against the side of the Maybach, folding his arms. "I'll let you two talk," he said to Claudia. "I'll be right over here, please talk to your colleague."

Claudia nodded once. Her expression had shifted to a perfectly neutral business face, but inside, she was boiling. She turned back to Julian, and spoke with a clipped voice.

"What exactly did you come here for, Mr. Knight?"

Julian gave a half-chuckle, running a hand through his damp hair. "Look, I know you sent that message on behalf of the new CEO—whatever he is. I got the email, alright? I sent back the money yesterday. And I just want to say it's really unfair."

"Unfair?" Claudia asked, folding her hand to her chest.

"Yes, Claudia. It's not right to suddenly pull back the loan I've been working hard to manage," he said, his voice rising a bit. "I have a wedding coming up. In a few weeks! I've already made a lot of plans. I promised my fiancée a billion-dollar mansion, a five-hundred-million-dollar wedding ceremony. I have decorators, vendors, reservations... and all of that would cost a lot, not less than 3 billion dollars."

His eyes widened as he spoke, gesturing wildly from being so desperate. "Please. I'm begging you. Just help me talk to the CEO. Convince him to release the loan back to me. Just a little more time. I promise I'll return the full amount once the wedding is over. Just a few more weeks."

Claudia kept a polite, unmoved expression. "Mr. Knight, I'm afraid I don't have that kind of authority. Only the CEO can make that decision."

Julian's mouth pressed into a hard line. "Exactly! That's why I rushed over here. I need to speak with him. Face-to-face. I have a personal stake in this. Please, just point me to his office. I'll go in and explain everything. I'm sure he'll understand."

Claudia shook her head slowly. "I'm sorry, Mr. Knight, but the CEO is currently... unavailable. He's not taking any meetings with lower-level staff at the moment."

"Lower-level?" Julian echoed, feeling insulted. "Are you calling me a lower-level staff? Ms. Duval, I'm one of the top consultants for the finance division!"

"You are just an assistant to Mr. Henry, who was also fired yesterday. That may be," Claudia said calmly, "but the CEO's time is very limited. If you have anything urgent, you may put it in writing and submit it through the official channel."

Julian's expression tightened with frustration. He opened his mouth to protest again but before he could, Ryan's voice cut in from the side.

"Julian," Ryan said, pushing off from the car with a casual stretch, "how about you manage the one billion you still have left? Use that for your big wedding."

Julian spun around in shock.

Ryan stood before him with his arms crossed and a blank face.

Julian took a step back. "What... what did you just say?"

"You heard me," Ryan said simply. "One billion. That's all you have left, isn't it? After blowing the rest of your funds on trying to impress Elizabeth and her family. I suggest you manage it wisely, or soon enough, you'll be as 'wretched' as you thought I was."

Julian's mouth opened. His entire face drained of color. He pictured himself being poor as Ryan, and shook his head quickly.

He stared at Ryan like he was seeing him for the first time, trying to understand how this man, the one he called worthless, the one he insulted a minute ago, could possibly know the exact balance left in his account.

"How... how do you know?"

Ryan took a step closer. "I know a lot, Julian."

Julian's voice broke as he stammered. "Wait. Who... who are you exactly?"

Claudia stepped up beside Ryan, pointing a very dangerous glare at Julian. "You should've asked that question before running your mouth."

Julian looked back and forth between them, suddenly looking like he wanted to disappear. His arrogance had vanished, replaced with panic and confusion.

Ryan didn't say another word. He turned and walked to the back seat of the Maybach.

Claudia gave Julian one last glance. "You should leave, Mr. Knight. I have to drop this man."

She joined Ryan in the car, the door shutting.

As the Maybach pulled away from the curb, Julian stood frozen in place. His shirt stuck to his body, the sun now feeling unbearably hot. His heart thundered in his chest.

"That pauper just entered a Maybach? Why would Claudia even drop such a dirty thing off?"

His heart kept pounding as he became confused...

"I will retaliate, Ryan... for making her not to listen to me. I will deal with you, I will crush you," he said.

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