

### Chapter 31

"I can, I can drive you—"

"It's fine," he cut her off gently. "You've done enough today. I'll be okay."

Claudia looked unsure, her eyes scanning his face. But when she saw the seriousness in his eyes, she gave a small nod.

"Just... please be careful," she said softly.

"I will."

Without wasting another second, Ryan dashed through the gates and flagged down the first bus heading toward the hospital.

The entire ride there, his leg bounced anxiously. His mind was a mess. Was the caller bluffing? Was it just an attempt to scare him? Or was someone truly after him... or worse, after his family?

Twenty minutes later, the bus screeched to a halt near the hospital gate. Ryan jumped down and sprinted toward the entrance. His feet thudded hard against the concrete. His heart was filled with fear.

But as he neared the main corridor, his heart slowed down at what he saw.

Red and blue lights flashed inside the hospital. Two police officers stood near the ward entrance, speaking with tension to the hospital staff. Patients and nurses looked distressed. Dr. Jerry was standing not far off, his hands on his head in a distraught gesture.

Ryan halted, his breath caught in his throat.

The hospital didn't feel the same anymore.

Police officers spoke with nurses while patients peeked out of their rooms, confused.

And right there, not far from the ward where his mother had been kept, stood Dr. Jerry—his hands on his head, his face looking so pale, his shoulders visibly shaking.

Ryan's heart dropped.

His breathing grew faster, shorter, and sharper. A strange heat crept up his back, and his hands felt clammy. He had never been so afraid.

Something was wrong.

Something was very, very wrong.

He took one slow step forward, and then another, until the anxiety inside him exploded.

"Doctor Jerry!" he called out to the Doctor with a loud voice.

The doctor turned at once, and when their eyes met, Ryan knew something terrible had happened.

"Ryan..." Dr. Jerry whispered, his voice trembling. "Oh God..."

Ryan rushed to him and grabbed both his shoulders tightly. His eyes were wide, wild, searching the doctor's face for an answer.

"Where is she?" Ryan asked, his voice shaking. "Where's my mother?!"

Dr. Jerry's mouth opened, but no words came for a moment. He blinked quickly, swallowed hard, and then finally spoke.

"She's... she's gone, Ryan. They took her."

Ryan blinked. "What?"

His hands slowly loosened their grip on the doctor's shoulders.

"What do you mean they took her?" he asked, softly this time, like he was afraid of hearing the answer.

"Two men," Dr. Jerry said, struggling to stay calm. "They came in about ten minutes ago. They were wearing hospital scrubs—looked just like our staff. They had ID cards, a stretcher, even a hospital trolley."

Ryan shook his head slowly. "No. No, that's not possible. She just woke up. You just called me. Why would anyone....?"

"They said they were transferring her to a private clinic," the doctor explained. "Said the CEO had arranged a better facility with your express permission. That you requested for the transfer to aid your mother recover faster."

Ryan's brows knitted together. "And you believed them?"

"We had no reason not to," Dr. Jerry said, his voice sounding strained because of the guilt. "The paperwork looked real. The uniforms, the language—they knew how to act. Even the security helped them open the gates."

Ryan took a step back, like the floor beneath him had shifted.

His vision blurred for a moment, and a heavy weight sat on his chest.

"And now?" he asked slowly. "Where is she now?"

Dr. Jerry's voice dropped to a whisper. "We don't know. We checked every private hospital in the area. No one admitted her. No one knows anything."

Ryan felt like the walls were closing in on him. The lights above flickered once. Or maybe his eyes were playing tricks on him. His thoughts were running too fast to catch. 1

"This can't be happening," he said under his breath. "Not again."

Dr. Jerry placed a gentle hand on Ryan's arm. "We checked the CCTV, Ryan. The footage shows them wheeling her through the back entrance. They didn't use the main lobby. They avoided every camera until the last one near the rear gate."

Ryan slowly looked up at him, afraid to ask the next question. "What car did they use?"

Dr. Jerry hesitated before answering.

"A white van. No license plate."

A chill went down Ryan's spine.

His fingers curled into fists.

There was no license plate, no records. everything had been planned, they came for her. It wasn't an coincidence or a mistake. It was a message.

Ryan turned away, placing a hand against the wall for support. His mind was spinning. That strange phone call from earlier echoed in his ears.

"Watch your back... and the people you care about."