

Chapter 43

After leaving the station, Ryan didn't call a driver or wait for a car. He took a bus down to his mansion in Central Town. The luxury of his lifestyle didn't matter right now. The only thing on his mind was his mother.

Detective Mark's voice and advice kept ringing in his head. He remembered how he had advised him to go to the party, even if Ryan didn't feel like it.

He sighed heavily. "Mark was right."

If he didn't go, he'd miss a critical chance to study them up close. Maybe they'd let their guards down at the party. Maybe someone would slip and he would find out something. His mother's life could depend on what he saw or heard at that party.

"Boss?"

The voice pulled him out of his thoughts. He looked up to see Claudia descending from the large staircase, looking ever beautiful and stunning.

"Where have you been all day? I tried calling you several times. You didn't answer. I was getting worried coupled with the thoughts of the strange call in the morning before you left. Are you alright?"

Ryan rubbed his face with both hands. "No, Claudia. I'm not alright."

She walked closer, her expression softening. "What happened, did something else happen apart from the call?"

He leaned back and stared at the ceiling for a while before speaking up. "My mom's been kidnapped."

Claudia froze instantly in her tracks after hearing this. "What?"

He looked back at her, the pain showing in his voice as he responded again. "She was taken right from the hospital. The doctor said some people came in, dressed like medical professionals. And claimed they were transferring her to a more advanced hospital on my orders."

Her hand flew to her mouth. "But... you didn't..."

"I didn't authorize any of it," Ryan snapped, then sighed. "The person behind the call... the one who sent that threatening message... they planned it. And we still don't know who they are."

Claudia slowly sat beside him. "Do you have any idea? Any suspects at all?"

Ryan's jaw clenched. "Only the McCarthys, Elizabeth, and Julian. One of them or someone working with them. I dragged them into the station because I suspected them. Now, I'm more convinced than ever."

Ryan suddenly looked down at the floor, his fists tightening a bit from the rage boiling in him. "If they had anything to do with my mother's disappearance... I swear, Claudia, I will destroy them and they will never rise again." ①

She reached for his hand gently. "So... what about the Stallion Night VIP party?"

Ryan looked up at her. "What about it?"

"Are you still going? I mean... with everything happening..."

He checked his watch. It was already 6:00 PM.

He nodded slowly. "Yeah. I have to go. That party's crawling with the

people I need to watch. Julian, Elizabeth... probably even her parents."

He turned to her, and his eyes softened just slightly. "And I'll need someone with me, someone beautiful. And frankly, I can't think of anyone more fitting than Claudia Duval, the face of this town, and the only female billionaire who intimidates every boardroom she walks into."

Claudia smiled, lightly brushing a lock of hair from her face. "It would be my pleasure, Mr. Walker."

Ryan let out a tired but genuine chuckle. "Thank you. I needed that."

She stood up from where she sat at on the couch beside Ryan and straightened a little. "Well, if we're going to do this, I need to start getting ready. There's not much time."

After she left, Ryan sat quietly for a moment longer. The thought of showing up at a glamorous event while his mother could be in danger made his chest tighten. But Mark was right—this was his best shot at observing them. He needed to stay strong, and he needed to look confident.

By 7:30 PM, Claudia returned to Ryan's room.

Ryan stood near the window, fully dressed in a tailored black tuxedo, his tie perfectly set. The look was clean, powerful and unmistakably elite. But behind his eyes was a storm.

Claudia's entrance turned the room to silence.

She wore a deep red gown that made her look so elegant and classy. The dress hugged her curves elegantly, with a necklace that screamed class and luxury. Her hair was pinned to perfection, and her earrings sparkled

like stars.

Ryan stared, visibly stunned. "You look... incredible."

She smirked. "So do you. Now let's go win an award."

He offered his arm, and she hooked hers around it.

A few minutes later, they were stepping into one of the most expensive sports cars in the world, parked in Ryan's garage... the Pagani Zonda HP Barchetta, worth \$17.5 million.

Their driver drove it out of the streets of Central Town. The roads were lined with people arriving for the Stallion Night VIP Party, one of the state's grandest annual events. When they pulled up to the venue, Vibrant Hall, on 5th Grand Avenue, it was clear the event would be filled with powerful guests.

The entire venue showed wealth even from the outside. There were hundreds of luxury cars parked in perfect rows.

But none came close to the Pagani that Ryan just stepped out from.

As the car's door lifted, Ryan stepped out, offering a hand to Claudia, who followed elegantly. Photographers at the entrance gasped quietly and began snapping photos. Claudia Duval and a mystery man? The media would be busy tomorrow.

He took her arm and they began walking toward the red carpet entrance. Claudia leaned in closer to Ryan.

"Try to keep your face unreadable," she whispered. "Smile like you own everything they wish they could afford."

Ryan nodded. "Got it."

Just as they reached the velvet rope, Claudia's phone rang, a call was coming in. She glanced at it and frowned.

"Just a quick business call, I'll join you inside as soon as possible," she whispered.

Ryan nodded, letting go of her arm. "I'll be inside waiting then"

He continued walking forward alone.

And then there they were. Ryan spotted them from afar, their backs were turned as they faced the entrance as if they were about to walk in as well.

Julian and Elizabeth, standing near the gate, dressed to impress, their eyes scanning for people to look down on. Julian wore a navy tuxedo with gold cufflinks. Elizabeth had on an emerald silk dress.

Elizabeth spotted Ryan first.

And immediately her eyes met him, she burst into laughter. "Oh my God. Who borrowed you that suit? You look like a goat pretending to be a gentleman."

Julian turned to look and joined in with a cruel smirk. "Elizabeth's right. That suit looks ridiculous on you. I've seen better-looking mannequins. But more importantly, what the hell are you doing here, Ryan?"

He stopped in front of them, looking completely unbothered, his hands in his pockets. His eyes scanned their annoying faces, but he didn't say a word.