

Chapter 6

The security guard stood stiff, holding Ryan's arms tightly like they were restraining a criminal. He thought Ryan would escape at the slightest chance. The saleswoman who had started the entire mess, stood beside him with an overconfident look on her face.

All Ryan did was stay silent.

He didn't argue. He didn't beg.

"I just called the police and they are on their way to pick you up," the manager said to Ryan, hoping he would be trembling and begging. But Ryan knew he was clean and didn't have any intention to steal.

But something in his calmness made a few customers watching feel uneasy.

"Why is he so confident looking like that?" one of the customers whispered to one other person that was standing there.

"I guess he has been stealing for years now. The police doesn't scare him anymore," the second person responded.

Their words provoked Ryan and he was about to open his mouth to confront them before the glass door slid open.

It caught everyone's attention at once and all of them turned towards the door.

The atmosphere changed immediately as everyone caught sight of the figure that walked through the door.

A tall woman in her early thirties walked in, dressed in a navy blue pantsuit and red high heels that clicked against the floor.

She was so beautiful even the manager had been secretly crushing on her but she would never even look his way. Her presence commanded attention—not just because of her elegance, but because everyone knew who she was.

Her name was Claudia Duval, the owner of Ricco S-Class Store.

She was a powerhouse in the fashion industry, and more importantly, an ambassador of Nova Inc. She had come to the store today not to check on her business but as a representative of Nova Inc. She was the representative that was supposed to meet Ryan from the message he got in the app. But Ryan wasn't aware of this yet.

Her hair was tied neatly at the back, and her posture looked so confident. Every staff member straightened the moment they saw her. Even the manager looked so composed.

"Ma'am!" said Saleswoman said immediately, rushing over with a wide smile. "Thank God you're here. We have a situation."

The manager quickly cleared his throat and eagerly moved beside the saleswoman.

"There was an attempted theft, Ms. Duval," he added. "This man walked in pretending to shop but tried to snatch one of the jackets off the mannequin. We stopped him before he could run."

Claudia didn't respond right away. Her eyes moved past them and landed on Ryan who she had traced down to her own store, using the location tracker on his Nova account.

Her expression changed the moment she saw his face.

The silence that followed made the saleswoman and the manager glance at each other in confusion.

Claudia slowly stepped forward.

She looked at Ryan carefully, then turned her eyes to the guard still holding him.

"You," she said, pointing at the manager. "Let go of him."

The guard hesitated and looked at the manager, unsure what to do.

"Now," she raised her voice.

The guard let go of Ryan immediately.

Ryan rolled his shoulder slightly, not saying anything yet. But deep down he wasn't sure why he was receiving this treatment from her.

Claudia turned back to the manager. Her face was unreadable.

"Do you know who this is?" she asked coldly, with a voice that made the manager almost tremble.

The manager blinked. "Ma'am, I told you, he's a nobody. He walked in looking like—well, I mean—he obviously doesn't belong here. Look at how he is dressed, he is just a nobody."

Claudia's gaze hardened immediately.

Then, without warning, she stepped forward and slapped the manager across the face.

SLAP!

The sound echoed through the store, and his face turned pale.

Everyone froze. Even the customers watching from a distance were stunned into silence.

The saleswoman gasped out loud, taking a step back. The security guard didn't move.

"Do you have any idea who you just insulted?" Claudia said sharply. "This man is..." she wanted to tell everyone Ryan was the Grand Winner of the Nova Coin Project, but stopped midway, choosing to protect his identity.

The manager stood frozen, his cheek red from the slap.

The saleswoman quickly jumped in. "Ma'am, I think you've made a mistake. He can't be any important personality. He came in here in these rags looking like he sleeps in the park. He didn't even have a wallet. He looked at the jacket like he couldn't afford to breathe near it!"

Claudia turned her attention to her. "And what about that gave you the impression that he was a thief?"

"He was reaching for the jacket!" she argued. "He was clearly going to steal it. Are we just letting anyone walk in and touch things now?"

Claudia's eyes narrowed. "So you decided he was a thief... based on what? His clothes?"

The arrogant saleswoman folded her arms, defensive now. "He looked poor. No rich person walks into Ricco looking like that. I was just doing my job."

"No," Claudia said. "You were doing what every narrow-minded person does—judging a man based on appearances. And now, you've humiliated someone we should've welcomed with respect."

The saleswoman held back a chuckle. "Respect? How can we respect this street rat?"

Claudia stared at her for a moment. Then, with a calm tone, she said her next words, "You're fired."

The saleswoman froze, her mouth dropped open. "What? Ma'am, no, wait. I've worked here for four years. You can't fire me over... over this! He didn't even say who he was!"

Claudia didn't flinch. "You made that decision the moment you yelled 'thief' at one of the wealthiest men in this city."

She turned to the security guard who had first grabbed Ryan.

"You too," she said. "Hand in your badge and leave."

The man looked stunned. "I was just following orders—"

"You grabbed a man without evidence. You assumed guilt without asking a single question. Leave."

The guard didn't argue further. He slowly unclipped his badge and dropped it into a tray at the front counter.

The saleswoman was still pleading, her voice was desperate now. "Please, Ms. Duval. I didn't mean it. I swear I didn't know who he was. I thought—"

Claudia raised a hand to cut her off. "You thought wrong. And now you've cost yourself your job."

Ryan still hadn't spoken.

He simply stood there, watching everything unfold with the same calm expression on his face. Who was this woman, and why had she stepped in for him?

Claudia finally turned back to him. Her tone softened.

"I'm terribly sorry about all of this, Mr. Walker," she said with genuine regret. "Please allow me to personally assist you."

Ryan looked at her, wondering how she knew his name.

Claudia smiled and gestured toward a hallway behind the reception desk.

"You must have received a notification on the Nova App, we have a lot to discuss. Mr. Walker, please come with me. Let me take you to our private VIP chamber," she said. "We don't just serve clients like you at the front display. I'll make sure everything about your shopping is handled properly as well."