

The Ghost Wife's Billion Dollar Tech Comeback

Chapter 1 No.

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The sliding glass doors of BOS's Terminal 4 hissed open, spitting Eulalie Bradford out into the biting October wind. She shivered, pulling her trench coat tighter around her frame, her knuckles white against the handle of her silver Rimowa suitcase. It was heavier than she remembered. Or maybe she was just weaker.

She stopped at the curb, her eyes scanning the line of idling black town cars in the VIP pickup zone. She looked for the familiar license plate, the sleek silhouette of the Holloway family Maybach.

Nothing.

Just a line of indifferent taxis and a gust of exhaust fumes that tasted like burnt rubber and loneliness.

She pulled her phone from her pocket. The screen lit up, the brightness stinging her tired eyes. October 14.

No unread messages. No missed calls. Not from Caden. Not from the house manager. Not even from the automated calendar reminder she used to share with her husband.

Eulalie let out a short, dry breath that wasn't quite a laugh. She opened the Uber app, her fingers hovering for a second before typing in the destination: Holloway Penthouse.

The driver was a man named Tariq with a dashboard full of bobbleheads and a need to fill the silence. He talked about the weather, the traffic, the rising cost of bagels. Eulalie stared out the window, watching the gray blur of the Expressway. Her ears were ringing, a high-pitched whine that drowned out Tariq's voice.

Five years ago, their marriage had been a strategic merger—the pristine, old-money Bradford legacy sanitizing the ruthless, new-money Holloway capital. Caden had needed her family's irreproachable name to secure his first billionaire investors, and she, foolishly, had believed he actually wanted her. She had traded her brilliant coding career for the role of a perfect trophy wife, thinking love would eventually follow the contract.

"Big night for the city, huh?" Tariq asked, gesturing vaguely at the radio.

Eulalie blinked, focusing on the tinny sound coming from the speakers. An entertainment reporter's voice cut through the static.

"...and all eyes are on the Plaza Hotel tonight, where tech darling Adalynn Pennington is hosting a massive celebration for her latest product launch. Rumor has it the guest list is exclusive to the city's top one percent..."

Eulalie's hand flew to her seatbelt, gripping the nylon strap until her fingernails dug into her palm. The pain was sharp, grounding. Adalynn. Her half-sister. The woman who had taken her father's attention, her family's legacy, and now, apparently, her husband's time on her birthday.

"Yeah," Eulalie whispered, her voice raspy. "Big night."

The car pulled up to the limestone façade of the building on Fifth Avenue. The doorman, a young guy named Leo, did a double-take when he saw her stepping out of a Toyota Camry instead of the family car.

"Mrs. Holloway?" Leo scrambled forward, reaching for her luggage. "We... we didn't know you were coming back today."

"It's a surprise, Leo," she said, putting a finger to her lips. The lie tasted like ash on her tongue. She wasn't surprising them. She was saving face.

The elevator ride to the penthouse felt like an ascent to the gallows. The numbers ticked up-20, 30, 40. Her heart hammered against her ribs, a frantic, uneven rhythm. She checked her reflection in the polished brass doors. Her face was pale, devoid of makeup, dark circles bruising the skin under her eyes. She looked like a ghost.

Ghost. The old nickname from her coding days flashed in her mind. She pushed it away.

The elevator doors slid open silently.

The foyer was a minefield of colorful tissue paper and curling ribbons. A pair of Caden's Italian leather loafers were kicked off haphazardly near the console table, next to a tiny pair of glittery sneakers.

Laughter drifted from the living room. It was the sound of Elara, her five-year-old daughter. A sound that usually filled Eulalie with warmth, but today, it chilled her. It was a high, breathless giggle, the kind Elara only made when she was getting exactly what she wanted.

Eulalie left her suitcase by the door and stepped softly onto the Persian rug. She moved behind the lacquered ebony screen that separated the foyer from the living area, peering through the slats.

The scene before her was bathed in the warm, golden light of the chandelier.

Caden Holloway was on his knees. The ruthless venture capitalist, the man who terrified boardrooms, was kneeling on the carpet, holding up a massive, plush unicorn with a pink ribbon around its neck.

"Daddy!" Elara was jumping up and down on the sofa, her curls bouncing. "Auntie Adalynn is going to love it! It's the limited edition one!"

Caden smiled, a genuine, crinkling-of-the-eyes smile that Eulalie hadn't seen directed at her in years. He smoothed the unicorn's mane. "Of course she will, Elara. You picked it out."

Eulalie's breath hitched. Her hand went to her chest, pressing hard.

Three months ago, she had tried to buy that exact unicorn for Elara. Caden had scoffed, calling it "clutter" and "garish." He had told her to buy educational wooden blocks instead.

"Mommy said unicorns are silly," Elara chirped, grabbing the toy and hugging it. "But Adalynn says they are magical."

"Auntie Adalynn is right," Caden said, standing up and brushing lint from his trousers. "We better get going. We don't want to be late for her party."

Eulalie's handbag slipped from her numbed fingers. The heavy gold clasp hit the marble floor with a sharp clack.

The sound shattered the domestic tableau.

Caden spun around. His eyes found her instantly. The warmth evaporated from his face, replaced by a mask of irritated surprise. His jaw tightened.

Elara froze, the unicorn clutched to her chest. Her eyes widened, and then, instinctively, she took a step back, moving behind Caden's leg.

"Eulalie?" Caden's voice was flat. "You're back. Why didn't you text Carter to pick you up?"

Eulalie opened her mouth, but her throat was dry, closed up. She swallowed hard. "Today is October 14th."

Caden glanced at his Patek Philippe watch, distracted. "I know the date. Adalynn's launch party is tonight. We're running late."

He didn't get it. He truly, honestly didn't remember.

Eulalie looked at Elara. Her daughter was peeking out from behind Caden's expensive suit pants, looking at her mother like she was a stranger who had interrupted a private game.

"Mommy came back at a bad time," Elara whispered loudly to her father. "We have to go see Adalynn."

The words were small, but they hit Eulalie with the force of a physical blow. Her knees felt weak. She reached out to steady herself against the wall.

"Martha will help you unpack," Caden said, already turning away, dismissing her presence as a logistical inconvenience. He scooped Elara up into his arms. "Let's go, bug. Don't want to keep the princess waiting."

"Bye, Mommy!" Elara waved, her attention already shifting back to the toy in her hands.

They walked past her. Caden smelled of sandalwood and the expensive scotch he liked. He didn't stop to kiss her. He didn't even brush her arm.

The elevator doors closed on them, swallowing her husband and daughter, leaving Eulalie standing alone in the center of the vast, silent penthouse.

She looked down at the floor. A card had fallen from the pile of wrapping paper.

"To the Best Auntie Adalynn."

Eulalie slowly crouched down. Her joints popped. She picked up the card. Her fingers didn't tremble. A strange, cold calm was spreading through her veins, freezing the tears before they could form. She stared at the card until the words blurred, her eyes turning dead and hollow.
