

Chapter 101 No.

The victory was short-lived. Caden's actions at Bradford Manor were like stirring up a hornet's nest, and the Pennington family's response was both swift and vicious.

The sound was not a noise; it was a physical assault.

At 2:14 AM, the high-pitched whine of an industrial hammer drill tore through the humid night air, vibrating the antique glass of the Bradford Manor windows. It was a jagged, relentless shriek that bypassed the ears and went straight to the bone.

Eulalie woke with a gasp, her heart hammering against her ribs like a trapped bird. She didn't check the time. She didn't check her phone. She threw off the covers and sprinted barefoot into the hallway.

She could hear the screaming before she reached the door.

"Incoming Incoming Get down!"

She burst into her grandfather Delmar's room. The old man was not in his bed. He was curled into a tight ball in the corner of the room, wedged between the heavy oak wardrobe and the wall. His hands were clamped over his ears so tightly his knuckles were white. His eyes were wide, unseeing fixed on a horror from fifty years ago.

"Grandpa, it's okay," Eulalie choked out, dropping to her knees. The floorboards dug into her skin. "It's just construction. It's not them. It's not Gussie."

"The bombers," Delmar sobbed, his body convulsing with tremors. "They found the frequency. They found us."

The drill outside whined higher, hitting a steel beam. Delmar shrieked a sound of pure, unfiltered terror.

Eulalie pulled him into her arms, trying to use her own body as a shield against the sound. She wrapped her limbs around his frail, shaking frame,

rocking him, whispering nonsense words into his hair. But she couldn't stop the vibration. The low-frequency thrum of the heavy machinery across the street was shaking the floor.

Tears of rage burned her eyes. This wasn't construction. You didn't drill foundations at two in the morning. This was torture.

Suddenly, a commotion erupted downstairs. The intercom buzzed violently, followed by the heavy thud of a fist pounding against the reinforced oak of the front door.

"Sir! You cannot enter! We have a protocol!" The voice of her night security chief, Miller, echoed up the stairwell, tight with professional aggression.

"Read the damn paper, Miller!" a voice roared back. It was a voice she knew too well.

"Mr. Holloway, step back from the door or I will deploy taser countermeasures. The restraining order is active. Five hundred feet!"

"Paragraph 4, Subsection B!" Caden screamed, his voice raw. "'Exception granted in cases of imminent physical danger to a minor or dependent resident!' Do you hear that screaming upstairs? That is a medical emergency! If he has a stroke while you're measuring distance, I will sue your firm into the stone age! Now open this door!"

Eulalie scrambled to the wall monitor in her grandfather's room. On the grainy black-and-white screen, she saw Caden shoving a crumpled legal document against the glass of the sidelight, his face pale and frantic. Miller had his hand on his holster.

"Miller, let him in!" Eulalie yelled into the intercom, her voice cracking. "Let him in! I'm authorizing it!"

The magnetic locks disengaged with a heavy clack.

Seconds later, Caden appeared in the doorway. He wasn't wearing his usual armor of a tailored suit. He was in jeans and a dark hoodie, breathing hard as if he had run from the perimeter gate. He was still clutching the crumpled waiver in a shaking hand.

He took in the scene in a single second: the darkness, the terrified old man, the weeping woman trying to hold him together.

The look on his face shifted. The confusion vanished, replaced by a darkness Eulalie had never seen before. It wasn't the cold arrogance of the boardroom. It was something primal.

"I called the police," Eulalie yelled over the noise, her voice cracking. "They said it's a civil dispute. They have to send a unit to measure decibels. It could take hours."

Caden didn't say a word. He didn't offer empty comforts. He turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

Eulalie felt the loss of his presence, but she couldn't move. She held Delmar tighter.

In the hallway, Caden pulled his personal cell phone from his pocket. He didn't dial the police. He didn't dial his lawyer. He dialed a number that belonged to the City Planning Commissioner, a man who owed his entire career to Holloway campaign donations.

"Commissioner Vance," Caden said. His voice was dead calm. "I don't care what time it is. The Pennington site on Oak Street. They are drilling into a load-bearing bedrock shelf that violates the geological survey code 404. It's a seismic hazard."

A pause. The voice on the other end sounded groggy and confused. "Mr. Holloway? I can't just revoke a permit at 2 AM without an inspection.."

"You can, and you will," Caden interrupted, staring out the hallway window at the floodlit construction site across the street. "Issue an emergency Cease and Desist order for 'Catastrophic Structural Risk.' Call the utility company and have them pull the site's power meter for safety compliance. If that site has power in five minutes, I will pull every cent of funding for the new municipal stadium. Do you understand?"

"Understood. Making the call now."

Caden hung up. He stood by the window, his hand gripping the sill so hard the wood groaned. He counted.

One. Two. Three.

Four minutes later, a utility truck that had been servicing a line two streets over screeched to a halt in front of the Pennington site. A city

official jumped out, waving a tablet. The foreman argued for a moment, but the official pointed to the power pole.

The grid didn't explode. There was no dramatic flash. Just the sudden, heavy clunk of a master breaker being thrown by the city worker.

The floodlights across the street died instantly. The drill groaned down in pitch, sputtering, then silenced. The sudden quiet was heavier than the noise.

Shouts erupted from the workers in the dark, confused and angry, but the machinery was dead.

In the bedroom, the vibration stopped. Delmar's sobbing quieted to a whimper. His muscles slowly uncoiled.

"They're gone," Eulalie whispered, stroking his back. "The planes are gone, Grandpa."

Ten minutes later, Delmar was asleep, sedated by exhaustion. Eulalie walked out of the room, closing the door softly. Her legs felt like jelly.

Caden was waiting at the end of the hall. He was leaning against the wall, arms crossed, staring at the floor. Miller stood ten feet away, hand still hovering near his belt, watching Caden like a hawk.

Eulalie walked up to him. The house was silent.

"You did that," she said. It wasn't a question.

Caden looked up. His eyes were tired. "Bureaucracy is faster than electricity if you know whose neck to squeeze."

"You shouldn't be here, Caden," she said, her voice soft but firm. "Miller is right. The order..."

"I saw the lights from my car. I was parked down the block," Caden admitted, pushing off the wall. "I heard the drilling. I knew what it would do to Delmar. I keep the emergency waiver in my glove box. Just in case."

Eulalie swallowed the lump in her throat. "Thank you. For stopping it."

"Don't thank me yet," Caden said, his voice grim. "I just declared war on the city zoning board. But if it bought him some sleep, it was worth it."

He walked past her toward the stairs, nodding once to Miller, who stepped aside to let him pass. Eulalie stood there, her heart beating a strange, erratic rhythm. She had spent years begging him to care, to notice. Tonight, he hadn't just noticed. He had weaponized his influence to buy her silence.

She looked out the window. The Pennington site was a black void.

"Thank you," she whispered to the empty hall.