

Chapter 106 No.

"I owe you dinner," Eulalie had said to Harrison. "For the bodyguards. And the kite."

So they were at Le Bernardin. White tablecloths, hushed voices, seafood that cost more than a Honda.

It was going well. Harrison was funny, charming and didn't talk about business. He talked about art. He talked about how the light hit the Hudson River. He was trying very hard to be the antithesis of Caden, though Eulalie noticed he still checked the price of the wine with a slight wince-old habits of a man whose family wealth was tied up in trusts.

Then the maitre d' approached, looking pained.

"Madame, I apologize, but... there is a gentleman who insists his daughter needs to see you."

Eulalie turned. Elara was standing at the entrance, holding a stuffed bear. Behind her, looking sheepish but determined, was Caden.

"Mommy!" Elara ran over.

Eulalie caught her. "Elara? What are you doing here? It's Daddy's night."

"She was crying," Caden said, walking up to the table. He was wearing a suit that looked slept in. "She missed you. I couldn't get her to sleep."

It was a lie. Eulalie knew it. Elara was a champion sleeper. Caden was using the child as a shield to crash the date.

Harrison sighed, placing his napkin on the table. "Hello, Caden. Do you need a high chair? For yourself?"

Caden ignored him, but he didn't snap back. He looked humble, almost desperate. "Can we join? Just for a bit? Until she calms down?"

Eulalie looked at Elara's dry eyes. "Fine. Pull up a chair."

The waiters scrambled. The romantic dinner for two became an awkward dinner for four.

"I'll order for everyone," Caden announced, trying to take charge, but his voice lacked its usual command. He was trying to be helpful, to show he still had a place here. He looked at the waiter. "For the lady, the filet mignon. Seven ounces. Medium-well. Butterfly cut. She hates seeing red meat."

He smiled at Eulalie, a tentative, pleading smile. "I remember, Eulalie. I know what you like."

Eulalie stared at him. The silence stretched.

"Actually," Harrison said, signaling the waiter. "Bring the Wagyu ribeye. Rare. With the chimichurri."

Caden scoffed, shaking his head. "She won't eat that. It's too bloody. Trust me."

"Bring it," Eulalie said to the waiter, her eyes locked on Caden.

When the steak arrived, it was seared on the outside, deep red in the middle. Blood pooled on the white china.

Caden watched, waiting for her to send it back.

Eulalie picked up her knife. She cut a thick slice of the rare meat. She put it in her mouth and chewed slowly. She closed her eyes.

"Perfect," she said.

Caden looked like he'd been slapped. "But... you hate rare meat. You always said it tasted like iron."

"I said that five years ago, Caden," Eulalie said, wiping her mouth. "Because you hated rare meat, and I was trying to make cooking easier. I love rare meat. I always have."

Harrison took a sip of his wine, hiding a smile.

"And I like spicy food," Eulalie continued. "And I hate jazz, even though you played it every night. And I don't like white roses, I like peonies."

She looked at him across the table. Her eyes were sad.

"You memorized a version of me that I created to survive you," she said.
"That woman doesn't exist anymore."

Caden looked down at his own plate. The food looked like ash. He realized, with terrifying clarity, that he was sitting next to a stranger. A stranger he was still in love with.

"I can learn," he whispered. "I can learn the new version."

"Harrison already knows it," Elara piped up, dipping a fry in ketchup.
"Harrison knows Mommy likes the red sauce."

Caden flinched. The blow from his daughter was the hardest of all.

He sat through the rest of the meal in silence, watching his wife laugh at Harrison's jokes, eating bloody steak, a woman he recognized but didn't know at all.