

Chapter 108 No.

Caden didn't go to bed. He returned to the study ten minutes later with two glasses of whiskey.

"We need to talk," he said.

Eulalie accepted the glass. Her hands were shaking slightly, the adrenaline of the hack fading. "About my criminal activities?"

"About the hate," Caden said. He sat in the leather armchair opposite her. "I get the noise. I get the rudeness. But this... this war between you and Gussie. It's personal. It's deeper than bad neighbors."

Eulalie took a sip of the whiskey. It burned, grounding her.

"You really don't know, do you?" she asked.

"Know what?"

"Why my grandfather, Delmar, lost his mind."

Caden frowned. "He had a breakdown. The pressure of the academic world."

"He was destroyed," Eulalie corrected. "By Gussie. My father, her husband, let it happen."

She set the glass down. "Twenty years ago, Gussie was my father's grad student. His favorite. She seduced him. My mother found out and left. But that wasn't enough for Gussie."

Eulalie's voice went cold. "She stole his algorithm. The core code for his neural network thesis. She published it under her name. When my father tried to report her, she threatened to accuse him of sexual assault. In the 90s, without proof... it would have ended him anyway."

Caden felt a chill that had nothing to do with the drafty house.

"So he let her take it," Eulalie whispered. "He lost his life's work. He lost his reputation. He lost his mind. My grandfather, Delmar, had to watch his son crumble under the injustice of it all. It broke him, too. And Gussie? She used that stolen prestige to marry Grady Pennington."

Caden stared at her. The glass in his hand felt heavy.

"Adalynn," he said, his voice hoarse. "Adalynn is living on stolen money."

"Adalynn is the daughter of the woman who broke my family," Eulalie said. "And you... you almost married her. You funded her. You bought her jewelry with the money my father should have earned."

Caden stood up. He felt sick. Physically nauseous. He had brought the enemy into his bed. He had paraded Gussie's daughter in front of Eulalie, demanding she play nice.

"I didn't know," he said. It was a weak defense.

"You never asked," Eulalie said. "You saw a sad old man and a bitter wife. You never asked why."

Caden walked to the window. He looked at the red-lit house across the street. He felt a rage so pure it frightened him. He had been a pawn. Gussie and Adalynn had played him for a fool.

"I will destroy them," Caden said.

"Get in line," Eulalie said. "I'm already doing it."

"No," Caden turned to her. "You're playing pranks with lights. I'm talking about earth. Scorched earth."

He finished his whiskey in one swallow.

"I'm sorry," he said. The words felt inadequate, tiny against the mountain of her pain.

"Sorry doesn't fix my family's legacy, Caden."

"No," Caden said. "But eviction might help him sleep."

He walked out of the room. He wasn't going to call Bill this time. He was

going to call the bank. He was going to call the zoning board. He was going to call everyone he owned.

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