

Chapter 17 No.

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Eulalie sat at her desk, organizing files. Her hand was still bandaged, a stark white reminder of the coffee incident.


Caden walked in at 9:00 AM. He looked like hell. His eyes were bloodshot, his suit slightly rumpled. He hadn't slept.

He stopped at her desk. He didn't say hello.


"You were at a club," he accused, his voice low and dangerous. "While your daughter was in anaphylactic shock."

Eulalie didn't flinch. "I was off the clock, Caden. And I warned Martha. I brought the medicine to the gate myself because I knew you and Adalynn were incompetent. If you had listened to me about the dress—or anything ever—it wouldn't have happened."

"You should have come in!" Caden slammed his hand on her desk. "You're her mother!" 

"Am I? Because last night you handed a microphone to our daughter and let her call your mistress 'Mommy Adalynn,'" Eulalie shot back, standing up. "Start acting like a father. Stop outsourcing your parenting to your mistress and your maid." 

"Don't you dare talk about Adalynn. She was traumatized."

"Traumatized by vomit on her shoes? Poor thing. Send her my condolences." 

Carter scurried over, holding a massive pile of archival boxes. "Uh, guys? Not to interrupt, but Eulalie, these need to be digitized. By five."

"Busy work," Eulalie noted. "Punishment?"

"Just work," Caden sneered. "If you want your final paycheck, do your job." 

Eulalie's phone rang. A shrill, piercing tone she reserved for emergencies.

She looked at the screen. Grandmother Bradford.

She answered immediately. "Grandmother?"

"Eulalie..." The old woman's voice was shaking thin and brittle. "It's Horton. He collapsed. His blood pressure... The bank sent the final notice. Obsidian Ventures called it in. They are demanding immediate repayment of the full \$12 million principal by 5 PM today or they seize the deed. They aren't waiting for the end of the month. Horton thinks he failed us."

Eulalie's heart stopped. "Is he okay? Is he in the hospital?"

"He's here. He refuses to go. He says he wants to die in his own house before they take it."

"I'm coming" Eulalie said.

She hung up and grabbed her bag.

"Hey!" Carter shouted. "Where are you going? The files!"

Eulalie pushed past him. Carter tried to block her path, stepping in front of her. 

"You can't leave!" Caden said—

Eulalie didn't think. She shoved Carter. Hard. With her good hand.

He stumbled back, tripping over a box and crashing into the photocopier with a loud thud.

Caden stepped out of his office. "Eulalie! What the hell?"

Eulalie spun around. Her eyes were blazing with a fire Caden had never seen. It wasn't sadness. It was pure, unadulterated power.

"My family needs me," she said, her voice vibrating with intensity. "If anything happens to my uncle because of your games... Caden, I swear to God, I will burn this company to the ground."

Caden sneered, stepping closer. "Is that a threat? I could call security right now. Assaulting an employee? I could have you arrested and destroy any chance you have of seeing Elara again."

Eulalie stepped into his space, lowering her voice so only he could hear. "Do it. Call them. And while we wait, I'll email the board the unredacted logs of your 'business dinners' with Adalynn charged to the company account before the divorce filing. Misappropriation of funds? That's a firing offense, Caden."

Caden's mouth clamped shut. He was paralyzed by the realization that she held cards he didn't know existed.

She turned and ran to the elevators.

Forty minutes later, she skidded her rental car into the gravel driveway of Bradford Manor. The once-grand estate looked tired, the paint peeling, the gardens overgrown.

She ran inside.

Uncle Horton was lying on the velvet sofa in the drawing room, his face grey, a damp cloth on his forehead. Her grandmother sat beside him, holding his hand, weeping silently.

On the coffee table lay the letter. "Notice of Foreclosure. Creditor: Obsidian Ventures."

"I'm sorry, Eulie," Horton wheezed. "I tried. The interest rates... they hiked them overnight."

"Shh," Eulalie knelt beside him. She took his cold hand. "It's okay. Nobody is taking the house."

"They are, child. We need twelve million dollars by five. We have nothing."

Eulalie opened her laptop on the coffee table. She connected to the spotty Wi-Fi.

"We don't have nothing," she said.

She logged into her offshore account. "Ghost Holdings." The funds she had liquidated on Saturday were sitting there, cleared and ready.

She entered the routing number for the Bradford Family Trust.

"Amount: \$12,000,000.00"

"Eulalie, what are you doing?" Grandmother asked, wiping her eyes. "Don't look at it. It hurts too much."

"Watch," Eulalie commanded gently.

She typed in her authorization key. It was a long string of alphanumeric characters she had memorized.

"TRANSFER INITIATED."

"PROCESSING ..."

"SUCCESS."

The screen flashed green.

Eulalie turned the laptop around.

Horton squinted at the screen. His eyes widened. He grabbed his chest.

"Twelve ... million?" he gasped. "Eulalie? Did you... did you borrow this from Caden? Oh, no, child, you can't be in his debt!"

"It's not Caden's money," Eulalie said, her voice steady. "It's mine. Every cent."

"But how? You... you make cupcakes."

Eulalie smiled, a sad, secretive smile. "The cupcakes were just for the PTA meetings, Uncle. I've been writing algorithms for automated trading systems for the last seven years. They pay better than baking."

Horton started to cry, great heaving sobs of relief. "You saved us. You saved us."

Eulalie kissed his forehead. "Rest now. I have to go back. I have one more thing to finish."

She stood up. The fragile, broken girl who had left the manor five years ago to marry a 'prince' was gone. The woman standing there was the queen, and she had just secured her castle.
