

Chapter 18 No.

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"You have to tell us," he whispered. "Is it... is it legal?"

Eulalie packed her laptop. "It's legal. It's crypto, Uncle. I invested early. Before I met Caden."

It was a half-truth. She had mined it while Caden was asleep, using the electricity he paid for. In a way, he had contributed.

"Now," Eulalie said, her tone shifting to business. "Use the extra capital in the trust. Buy back the shares of Bradford Department Stores that are floating on the market. Quietly. Don't spike the price."

"Buy back?" Horton sat up, color returning to his cheeks. "But the stores are failing."

"Not for long," Eulalie said. "I have a plan. Just get the equity back."

She drove back to the city. The adrenaline was fading, replaced by a cold, hard resolve.

She walked back into Holloway Holdings at 4:00 PM.


Carter looked up, nursing a bruised elbow. He glared at her but didn't say a word. He was afraid of her now.

Eulalie sat down. She pulled the stack of archival files toward her.

She didn't just digitize them. She wrote a script.

Since her right hand was useless for rapid typing, she plugged in a high-sensitivity microphone. She spoke quietly, dictating macro commands into a custom voice-to-code interface she had developed. "Execute batch scan. Optical Character Recognition English. Target Directory: Archive Alpha. Sort by Date. Append Metadata."

The computer obeyed. The scanner whirred to life, feeding pages 0.0%

10:14 

automatically .

What would have taken Carter a week took her forty-five minutes of supervision. She corrected the metadata errors with single-key strokes from her left hand. She optimized the search function.

At 4:55 PM, she stacked the physical boxes neatly on Carter's desk.

"Done," she said. "And I fixed your filing system. You're welcome."

Carter gaped. He checked the server. The files were there, perfectly indexed. "How did you...?"

"Efficiency, Carter. Look it up."

She grabbed her bag. It was 5:00 PM.

Caden walked out of his office. He had re-tied his tie and combed his hair.

"Good, you're back," he said, as if the morning's screaming match hadn't happened. "Adalynn is... indisposed. Some crisis with her company's server farm overheating. I need you to come to the Chamber of Commerce dinner tonight."

Eulalie paused. She looked at him. He really thought he could just toggle her on and off like a light switch.

"No," she said.

"It's not a request. It's an appearance. We need to present a united front. Rumors are starting."

"Rumors that you're sleeping with your wife's sister? Those aren't rumors, Caden. That's the newsletter."

The office went silent.

Caden's face turned a deep, violent shade of red. "Lower your voice."

"I am not your wife tonight," Eulalie said, speaking clearly so everyone could hear. "I am your employee. And my shift is over. I am not paid for overtime. And I certainly don't get paid to play dress-up to cover your infidelity."

"You are obligated—"

"I am obligated to file papers and answer phones," she cut him off. "If you need a pretty prop to stand next to you and smile while you talk about synergy, go on Tinder. I hear it's full of aspiring actresses."

Someone in the back of the office snorted. A stifled laugh rippled through the room.

Caden looked around, furious. "You think you're funny? You think you can humiliate me?"

"I don't have to humiliate you, Caden," Eulalie said, pressing the elevator button. "You're doing a great job all by yourself."

The elevator arrived. She stepped in.

"If you leave," Caden shouted, pointing a finger at her, "I will ruin you! You'll never work in this town again!"

Eulalie held the 'Close Door' button.

"I'm counting on it," she said.

The doors slid shut, cutting off his angry face.

Inside the elevator, Eulalie leaned her head against the cool metal wall. Her heart was pounding but not from fear. From exhilaration.

She pulled out her phone. She opened Signal.

Ghost: "I'm ready. Bradford Capital is entering the game."

Jory: "About time. I have the paperwork ready for the acquisition. Target: Holloway Retail Division"

Eulalie smiled. Caden was worried about a dinner date. She was coming for his legacy.
