

Chapter 19 No.

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Eulalie called in sick.

She spent the day at Bradford Manor. But not in the kitchen baking comfort food. She was in the library, the long oak table covered in blueprints and financial ledgers.

Horton and Grandmother sat opposite her. They looked like confused children.

"So," Eulalie said, sliding a document across the table. "This is the condition."

Horton put on his reading glasses. "Transfer of Voting Rights.. 51% control... to Eulalie Bradford."

He looked up. "You want to run the family trust?"

"I don't just want to run it," Eulalie said. "I want to weaponize it. The old way of doing business—being polite, waiting for the market to recover—is dead. If you want to keep this house, if you want to keep the legacy, I need absolute control."

"But your marriage..." Grandmother started. "Caden won't like this."

Eulalie placed a copy of her divorce filing on the table. "My marriage is over. I won't let family sentimentality be a weakness anymore. I have nothing but this mission."

She didn't mention Elara. The thought of her daughter was a jagged glass shard in her chest, but she couldn't let her grandmother see the blood. To save Elara, she had to destroy the world Adalynn was building around her.

"This is who I am now."

Horton looked at her. Grandmother nodded slowly.

"She has the fire, Horton. She reminds me of her grandfather. Before the... before the gentility ruined us."

Horton signed.

Eulalie took the paper. She felt a surge of responsibility. It was heavy, but it was hers.

"Okay," she said. "First order of business. We are liquidating the antique inventory in the warehouses. It's dead weight. We are pivoting the department stores to experiential retail. And we are integrating Nexus AI logistics."

"Nexus?" Horton asked. "That big tech company? They won't work with us."

"They will," Eulalie said. "I know the owner."

At Holloway Holdings, Caden was having a very bad day.

"What do you mean the debt is cleared?" he barked into the phone.

The banker on the other end sighed. "Mr. Holloway, the Bradford Trust paid the full principal and interest this morning. Twelve million dollars. Wire transfer."

"From where? Did Grady pay it?"

"No, sir. It came from an offshore entity. Ghost Holdings."

Caden hung up. He sat back in his chair, spinning a pen.

Ghost Holdings.

He knew that name. Or rather, he knew the word. Ghost. The mysterious coder who had built the backbone of his own company's architecture.

And then he thought of the Gala. Eulalie with Jory Stark.

His mind connected the dots, but the picture was distorted by his own ego.

"Jory," he muttered. "Jory gave her the money."

It had to be. Jory Stark was the only one with that kind of capital who would care about Eulalie. And Jory knew about the 'Ghost' coder legend. Naming the holding company 'Ghost' was exactly the kind of arrogant, inside joke Jory would play to mock Caden. He assumed Jory was sleeping with her and bankrolling her family to humiliate him.

A cold, ugly jealousy twisted in his gut. It wasn't just that she left; it was that she had upgraded.

He hit the intercom. "Carter! Get in here!"

Carter ran in.

"Find out everything about Eulalie's finances. Check her credit cards. Check her bank accounts."

"I... I already did, Boss. When she sent the medical bill. She has a checking account with \$400 in it. And a savings account with \$50."

"That's a lie," Caden hissed. "She just paid off a twelve-million-dollar debt. Dig deeper! Check for transfers from Jory Stark! Or Nexus AI!"

"I can't check Jory Stark's accounts, sir. That's illegal."

"I don't care! Hire a PI! Find out who she's sleeping with!"

Carter nodded and ran out.

Caden stood up and paced to the window. He looked down at the city.

"You think you can play me, Eulalie?" he whispered. "You think you can use another man's money to embarrass me?"

He decided he would confront her. Tonight. He would go home to the Penthouse. He knew she had filed papers, but his ego convinced him she must have snuck back. She had nowhere else to go. She was probably sitting in their closet right now, waiting for him.

Eulalie hadn't set foot there in days, and he knew she had filed papers, but Caden refused to accept the reality. In his mind, she had to return. Her clothes were there. Her life was there. She was just acting out.

"She's definitely there," Caden muttered, grabbing his coat. "She's probably crying in the closet right now, waiting for me to come home."

He needed to believe she was waiting. Because if she wasn't, he had lost control.

Eulalie left the Manor late. The sun had set, painting the sky in bruises of purple and black.

She felt tired but accomplished. The family was safe. The business plan was in motion.

She drove her rental car toward the highway.

As she merged onto the on-ramp, a black Maybach sped past her in the other direction, heading toward the city.

She recognized the license plate. CH 1.

Caden.

He was speeding. He looked aggressive.

She watched his taillights fade. They were traveling on opposite sides of the road, going in opposite directions.

"Goodbye, Caden," she whispered.

She didn't slow down. She pressed the accelerator, driving into the dark, toward her future.
