

Chapter 27 No.

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Monday morning The countdown clock in Eulalie's head said: 48 hours remaining until the board meeting.

She wasn't there as a regular employee. Her official role had ended weeks ago when she slammed that resignation letter onto Henderson's desk. She was here because Caden had been forced to re-hire her as an external "technical consultant" for a strictly limited 48-hour window. The legacy servers—the ones holding the last decade of financial data—were locked down tight. Caden's IT team had tried to migrate the data over the weekend and failed spectacularly, hitting a wall of encryption that only Eulalie's biometrics could bypass.

She needed to retrieve her personal hard drives. The ones containing the "Ghost" source code—her intellectual property—which were still hidden in the false bottom of her old desk drawer. She hadn't been able to take them during her hasty exit weeks ago, but she couldn't leave them behind now.

The office was quiet. But Caden's door was ajar.

She heard voices.

"She's still here? I thought she'd be gone after the dinner fiasco." Seraphina's voice. Grating.

"Two more days," Caden replied. He sounded tired. "I need her to authorize the admin transfer. She's the only one with the master passwords. Once she hands them over, we lock her out for good."

Eulalie paused outside the door, pressing herself against the wall.

"So, what's the plan?" Seraphina asked. "For the non-compete?"

"I've spoken to HR," Caden said. "We're going to blacklist her. I'll tell the industry she stole data. I'll ruin her reputation so she can't get hired by

anyone in this city."

Eulalie's eyes widened. He wasn't content with her leaving. He wanted to destroy her livelihood.

"Perfect," Seraphina laughed. "That will teach her. She'll be unhireable."

"Exactly," Caden said. "She thinks that stupid divorce filing means something? I shredded it. It doesn't exist. She's just having a tantrum. She'll burn through that consulting fee I gave her in a month. She's just a glorified secretary who got lucky with some passwords. She didn't write the code; she just hoarded the keys. When she runs out of money, she'll come crawling back. And then..."

"Then what?"

"Then I hire her back," Caden said. His voice dropped, becoming darker. "As a junior assistant. Minimum wage. No title. She needs to learn her place. She needs to understand that without me, she is nothing."

Eulalie felt a cold chill run down her spine.

He didn't just want to divorce her. He wanted to break her. He wanted to engineer her failure so he could rescue her and own her again. It was psychopathic. And delusional. He still refused to believe she was the architect of the system he was trying to steal.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out her phone. She opened the voice memo app.

"And Adalynn?" Seraphina asked.

"Adalynn moves into the corner office next week," Caden said. "She's bringing the Obsidian account with her. We're going to merge the operations. She's... useful. Unlike Eulalie."

"She's definitely better looking," Seraphina snorted. "And she got you the loan from Grady. That's a power couple move."

"Yeah," Caden agreed. "She's an asset."

Asset. That word again.

Eulalie stopped the recording.

She had it. Defamation. Conspiracy to commit employment fraud. Evidence of the merger with a conflict of interest.

Her phone buzzed in her hand. A text.

Isla: Hey E! I'm downstairs. Can I grab those keys? I have a track day. Pretty please?

The buzz was loud in the quiet hallway.

"Who's there?" Caden called out.

Eulalie shoved the phone into her pocket. She stepped into the doorway, her face a mask of boredom.

"Just me," she said. "Unlocking your precious servers."

Caden jumped slightly. He looked guilty. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough to know you should invest in soundproofing" Eulalie said. "But don't worry. I'm not interested in your... strategies. I'm just here for my cactus."

She walked to her desk, grabbed the small succulent she had kept alive for five years, and opened the drawer. She palmed the hard drives, slipping them into her blazer pocket.

"You're leaving early?" Seraphina challenged. "I thought you were the 'Consultant for the Day'."

"I have a lunch date," Eulalie lied.

"With who? A divorce lawyer?"

"Better," Eulalie smiled. "A life."

She walked out.

Down in the lobby, Isla was bouncing on the balls of her feet. She looked like a puppy waiting for a treat.

"Did you bring them?" Isla asked.

Eulalie pulled the Porsche key fob from her bag. She tossed it.

Isla caught it with one hand. She stared at it like it was the Holy Grail. "You are actually letting me drive it? No strings?"

"One string," Eulalie said. "Drive it fast. Make it scream. I need to know someone is enjoying it, because I have too much work to do."

Isla grinned. "I will drive it like I stole it."

"Good," Eulalie said. "And Isla?"

"Yeah?"

"Be careful with your brother. He's... crashing."

Isla's smile faded slightly. "I know. He's been weird. But hey, thanks for the car. You're the best sister I ever had. Even if you're technically... you know."

"I'm still your sister, Isla. Paperwork doesn't change that."

Eulalie watched Isla run out to the parking lot. She hailed a cab. She had files to upload. And a lawsuit to draft.
