

Chapter 28 No.

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The sky opened up at 3:00 PM. It wasn't just rain; it was a deluge. The city turned grey and slick.

Eulalie was at the library, working on the Bradford acquisition proposal. Her phone rang.

The screen displayed "No Caller ID."

Eulalie frowned. She was expecting a call from the bank regarding the loan restructuring rate lock. She answered immediately, putting on her professional voice.

"This is Ms. Bradford."

"Eulalie, finally," Caden's voice cracked through the line. He had clearly hidden his number to bypass her block.

"I need you to pick up Elara," Caden sounded frantic. "I can't make it."

"It's your duty, Caden. Carter usually handles the driver for you. I have a board meeting in twenty minutes."

"I fired the driver! And Carter is busy! Adalynn is stranded on the LIE. Her tire blew out. She's panicked. She's crying. Eulalie. It's dangerous out there."

"Adalynn has AAA. She has a phone. She knows how to change a tire better than you do, Caden. Call a tow truck."

"She wants me! She's scared! I have to go to her."

"So you're choosing to rescue a grown woman with a flat tire over picking up your five-year-old daughter in a storm?"

"Elara is fine! She's at school! Just go get her! Stop being so selfish!"

Click

He hung up.

Eulalie stared at the phone Selfish.

She looked at her laptop. The meeting with the bank for the Bradford loan restructuring was in 15 minutes. It was crucial. If she missed it, she might lose the rate lock.

But Elara was waiting.

She cursed. She packed up her laptop. She called the bank. "I have a family emergency. I need to reschedule."

"Ms. Bradford, we can't guarantee the rate..."

"I know. I'm sorry."

She hung up. She ran to her rental car.

Traffic was a nightmare. By the time she got to the private school, the pickupline was empty.

Elara was standing under the small awning near the gatehouse. An anxious security guard was hovering nearby with an umbrella, trying to coax her inside but she stubbornly refused to budge. She was soaking wet, shivering her hair plastered to her skull. She looked tiny against the grey stone of the building.

Eulalie pulled up. She jumped out with an umbrella.

"Elara! Get in!"

The security guard looked relieved. "Mrs. Holloway? We were about to call the emergency contact. The school is closing."

"I'm here now," Eulalie said sharply, her anger directed at the situation, not the man.

Elara looked at her. Her eyes were red. She didn't move.

"Where's Daddy?" she demanded.

"Daddy had... work," Eulalie lied. She couldn't tell the child her father chose the mistress.

"You're lying!" Elara screamed over the thunder. "Daddy said he was coming! And Adalynn said she was bringing cupcakes! Where are they?"

"They couldn't come, Elara. Get in the car, you're freezing."

"I don't want you!" Elara stomped in a puddle, splashing muddy water onto Eulalie's trousers. "I want Adalynn! You ruin everything! I want the cupcakes!"

The security guard watched, awkward and pitying.

Eulalie felt a crack in her chest. She grabbed Elara's arm. "Get. In. The. Car."

She shoved the resisting child into the backseat and slammed the door.

Eulalie got in the front. She was shaking. From cold, from rage.

"I hate you!" Elara screamed from the back, kicking the driver's seat. "I hate your stupid car! I hate your face!"

Eulalie gripped the steering wheel. Her knuckles were white.

I gave up a million-dollar deal for this.

Her phone buzzed in the cup holder. A text from Caden.

Caden: Where is she? The school called and said a woman took her. Is she with you?

Eulalie typed back with a shaking thumb: I have her. She was soaking wet and alone. You are despicable.

Caden: Good. Keep her tonight. I'm taking Adalynn to Le Bernardin to calm her nerves. She's really shaken up.

Le Bernardin. A three-star Michelin restaurant. While his daughter sat in a wet car, screaming.

Eulalie started to laugh. It was a low, broken sound.

"What's funny?" Elara stopped kicking. She looked scared. "Why are you laughing?"

Eulalie looked in the rearview mirror. Her mascara was running. She looked like a villain.

"I'm laughing because I'm a fool, Elara," she said softly. "And your father is a fool. And you..."

She stopped. She didn't say it. And you are just like him.

Eulalie picked up her phone. She typed a reply to Caden.

Eulalie: No. I am not your babysitter while you date your mistress. I am dropping her at the Penthouse. Martha can deal with the mess you made.

She put the car in drive.

"Where are we going?" Elara whined. "I don't want to go to your ugly house!"

"We aren't," Eulalie said, her voice turning to ice. "We are going to the Penthouse. You want your father's world? You can sit in it and wait for him."

She merged into traffic, heading straight for the Upper East Side. She wasn't going to save Caden from his own negligence tonight. If he wanted to leave his child alone to eat fancy fish, he would have to come home to a cold house and a crying daughter.
