

Chapter 30 No.

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That evening Eulalie didn't go to the penthouse. She knew Elara was there, likely being consoled with more gifts after being sent home from school.

Instead, she monitored the situation remotely from her loft.

Through the iPad audio link, she heard the chaos.

"It's Mommy's fault!" Elara was screaming. "She told the school! She's a witch!"

"I know, sweetie," Adalynn's voice cooed. "She's just jealous because you looked so pretty. She wants you to be plain like her."

"I hate her!" Elara yelled. "I wish she was dead!"

Eulalie flinched. The words were violent, shocking from a five-year-old. But she knew Elara didn't understand death. She just understood that Mommy was the obstacle to the fun.

"Don't say that," Caden said, but his voice was weak, distracted. "Just... calm down. Look, Adalynn bought you that purse you wanted."

Bribery. Again.

The iPad pinged with a notification. Eulalie accessed the screen mirror on her laptop. Elara was sending audio messages to Adalynn's phone, which was apparently in the same room, playing a game.

Audio Message from Elara: "Mommy is a meanie."

Audio Message from Adalynn: "Totally. She's a total drag. Don't worry, we'll have a spa day tomorrow. Just us girls."

Audio Message from Elara: "Can I wear the red lipstick?"

Audio Message from Adalynn: "Of course. Daddy won't mind."

Then, a photo appeared in the chat history. It was a picture Elara had taken of Eulalie last week during the drop-off, when Eulalie had briefly closed her eyes in the car.

Audio Message from Elara: "Look at her. She looks sleepy and ugly."

Audio Message from Adalynn: (Laughter) "She looks like a dead fish. Caden says she's boring like that all the time."

Eulalie stopped breathing.

They were mocking her. Not just her parenting. Her exhaustion. Her very existence. And her daughter—her flesh and blood—was participating. Parroting the insults.

Elara wasn't just a victim. She was being molded into an accomplice.

Eulalie closed the laptop. She walked to her small kitchen area. She poured the rest of the wine down the sink.

She had been trying to save the marriage for years. Then she tried to save the company. Then she tried to save the co-parenting relationship.

But you can't save a house that is already burning down while you are inside it.

She picked up her phone and dialed Jory.

"Do it," she said.

Eulalie said. "The full Short Sell Protocol. I want their stock to tank. Drive the price down so we can buy the Retail Division for pennies on the dollar. I want Caden so busy putting out fires that he can't even think about buying purses."

"Eulalie, that's nuclear. The board will panic."

"Good," she said. "Let them panic. I'm done being the safety net. I'm the one cutting the rope."

She hung up.

The silence that rushed back into the loft was deafening. The adrenaline that had fueled her call evaporated, leaving her trembling. She leaned against the kitchen counter, her knuckles white as she gripped the edge.

She had just ordered the destruction of her husband's legacy. It was necessary, yes. It was justice. But it didn't feel like victory. It felt like grief.

She looked at the black screen of the iPad. The voices had stopped, but the echoes remained. I wish she was dead.

Eulalie slid down the cabinets until she hit the floor. She pulled her knees to her chest in the empty, industrial kitchen. She wasn't the CEO of Nexus AI right now. She was just a mother who had lost her child to a woman with a glitter gun.

"I'm doing this for you, Elara," she whispered into the dark, trying to convince herself. "I have to break his world so I can build you a better one."

But as the night wore on, the certainty faded, replaced by a crushing cold loneliness.
