

Chapter 35 No.

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The race ended in a blur of smoke. The GTR crossed the finish line first. The crowd erupted. Adalynn drove the car toward a secluded VIP area under the scaffolding, away from the general crowd but clearly visible from where Eulalie and Isla stood in the shadows.

Eulalie's phone buzzed in her pocket. It wasn't a text. It was a call from Dr. Evans.

At 9:30 PM?

She answered, pressing the phone hard against her ear to hear over the cheering "Hello?"

"Mrs. Bradford? This is Dr. Evans. I'm sorry to call so late, but your lab results from the physical came back. Your cortisol and adrenaline levels are off the charts."

Eulalie froze. "Is it serious?"

"It's a severe panic attack warning and systemic cortisol overload," Dr. Evans said, his voice grave. "Your nervous system is literally stunned by the level of stress hormones. If you don't step back and rest immediately, this will escalate into a genuine cardiac event. I need you to come in for an evaluation."

Eulalie stood frozen. Her nervous system was short-circuiting under the strain of the emotional one breaking. A sharp pain radiated through her left arm, a phantom echo of the diagnosis.

"Is it... serious?" she asked.

"It could be. We need to rule out immediate risk. Do you have someone with you? A husband?"

Eulalie looked up at the VIP enclosure. Caden was running down the

stairs toward the parked GTR. He was glowing

"Hold on," Eulalie said.

She didn't know why she did it. Maybe it was a test. Maybe it was a final, desperate plea for humanity.

She dialed Caden's number.

She watched him stop near the car. He pulled his phone out. He looked at the screen. He saw her name.

Eulalie saw his face clearly under the strobe lights. His lip curled. A sneer of annoyance. Her again. Ruining the moment.

He didn't just let it ring. He pressed the red button. He declined the call.

Then he shoved the phone into his pocket and ran to the GTR. The driver's door opened. Adalynn stepped out. She took off her helmet, shaking out her long, blonde hair in a slow-motion cliché.

Caden pulled her into the shadows of the VIP tent, but the silhouette was unmistakable against the canvas. He lifted her off the ground, spinning her around. He kissed her. Not a peck. A deep, consuming kiss.

The phone in Eulalie's hand was still silent. The rejection was absolute.

"Mrs. Bradford?" Dr. Evans asked. "Are you there?"

Eulalie lowered the phone. She watched her husband celebrate his mistress while his wife stood in the dark, possibly dying.

"I'm here," Eulalie said. Her voice was steady. Dead steady. "I'll come alone. I'm always alone."

She hung up.

Beside her, Isla had gone quiet. The cheering had stopped for her.

"Is that..." Isla's voice was a whisper. "Is that Adalynn?"

Eulalie turned. Isla was staring at the shadows in the VIP tent. Her face was pale. The hero worship was crumbling, replaced by a look of utter confusion and disgust.

"Yes," Eulalie said.

"But... she's your sister. And she's... with Caden?"

Isla looked at Eulalie. She saw the sleek, flesh-colored compression glove Eulalie now wore to manage the scar tissue on her burned hand. She saw the phone Eulalie was gripping like a lifeline.

"He didn't answer your call, did he?" Isla asked. "I saw him decline it."

"No," Eulalie said. "He has better things to do."

Isla made a sound like a wounded animal. "That's gross. That's so... gross."

She threw her "GO CC" sign onto the ground. She stomped on it. The neon tube cracked with a sharp pop.

"Take me home, E," Isla said, grabbing Eulalie's hand. "Please. I think I'm going to be sick."

Eulalie squeezed Isla's hand. She looked at Caden one last time. He was laughing, wiping grease off Adalynn's cheek. He looked happy.

Enjoy it, Caden, she thought. Because tomorrow, the bill comes due. 📌

She turned her back on the light and led Isla into the shadows.
