

Chapter 36 No.

The tunnel leading to the parking lot was concrete and echoed with the sound of distant engines. It was a chokepoint.

As Eulalie and Isla walked briskly toward the exit, a group of men blocked their path.

"Well, look who it is."

Harrison Sterling, Caden's best friend. The son of a real estate mogul, and a man who wore entitlement like cologne. He was leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette. Behind him were three other hangers-on from Caden's circle. The tunnel was poorly lit, the overhead sodium bulb flickering. Eulalie pulled her cap lower, her face obscured in the gloom.

Harrison smirked, blowing smoke in their direction. He squinted at Isla, then at the shadowed figure beside her. "Little Isla Holloway. And her... chaperone? Did Mommy send the nanny to fetch you?"

The men laughed. It was a low, ugly sound.

Isla stepped forward, fists clenched. "Shut up, Harrison. Get out of the way."

Harrison ignored her. He stepped closer to Eulalie, invading her personal space. "You know, this is a private party. Not for staff. Or whatever you are."

Eulalie didn't step back. She didn't flinch. She waved the smoke away with her left hand.

"Move," Eulalie said. Her voice was calm, almost bored.

Harrison's smile faltered. There was something in the tone that pricked his drunken confidence. "Or what? You'll call the cops?"

Eulalie took a step forward, forcing Harrison to straighten up. She kept her face angled down, letting the darkness act as her shield.

"I don't need cops, Harrison. But considering I know about the 'zoning issue' regarding your father's wetland project... I'd be careful who you harass in dark tunnels."

Harrison's eyes went wide. He peered at her, trying to penetrate the shadow under the brim of her hat. "Who the hell are you? How do you know about that?"

Eulalie smiled. It wasn't a nice smile. "I know everything. I know about the wetlands. I know about the offshore accounts. And I know you're driving on a suspended license right now."

She leaned in, her voice dropping to a whisper.

"If you don't move out of my way, I will text the precinct captain. He's on my payroll now. You'll spend the night in a cell, and your daddy will have to bail you out. Again."

Harrison looked at her. He saw the outline of a woman, but the threat felt like it came from a ghost. He swallowed hard, the alcohol evaporating in the face of cold, hard leverage.

He stepped aside. Quickly.

"Let's go, boys," he muttered, not meeting her eyes. "Just some crazy bitch."

Eulalie walked past him, her head high. Isla followed, looking back at Harrison with a mixture of shock and glee.

When they reached the car, Isla exploded.

"Holy sht, E!" Isla yelled, buckling her seatbelt. "You just owned him! Precinct captain on my payroll? Is that true?"

Eulalie started the car. "No. But men like Harrison are cowards. They fear authority because they've never had to respect it."

Isla stared at her sister-in-law. "You are... terrifying. I love it."

Eulalie navigated the car out of the lot. Her hands were shaking on the wheel. It wasn't triumph she felt. It was exhaustion. Being strong was exhausting.

Isla looked out the window. "I'm sorry, E. About Caden. About Addie. I didn't know. I thought... I thought they were just friends."

"They were never just friends, Isla."

Isla slumped in her seat. "I feel stupid. I idolized her."

"Don't feel stupid," Eulalie said softly. "Adalynn is good at what she does."

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 +120 Points at most

She sells a fantasy. But fantasies are expensive. And someone always has to pay."

"Who pays?" Isla asked.

Eulalie looked at the road ahead. The city lights were a blur.

"Usually, the wife," she said. "But not this time."



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