

Chapter 4 No.

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Eulalie punched a code into the keypad. The heavy steel door groaned open.

This loft was hers. Bought three years ago with Bitcoin earnings she'd mined on a laptop hidden in the laundry room. Caden didn't know it existed. To him, crypto was "fake money for nerds."

She took the freight elevator up. The loft was open, raw. Concrete floors, exposed ductwork.

She set her suitcase down and immediately opened the second one. She pulled out the hard drive.

She didn't plug it into a standard computer. She walked to a heavy, reinforced steel cabinet in the corner of the loft—a Faraday cage she had installed herself. Inside was her custom-built rig: air-gapped, running a Linux kernel she had written from scratch. There would be no digital footprints, no pinging off local towers.

She connected the drive. Her fingers flew across a mechanical keyboard.

The screen flooded with green text.

"LOGIN: GHOST"

"PASSWORD:"

"ACCESS GRANTED."

She exhaled, her shoulders dropping for the first time in five years. She wasn't Mrs. Holloway here. She was Ghost. The co-founder of Nexus AI. The architect of the CUAP Protocol.

She opened a terminal window. She didn't hack into Holloway Holdings directly—that was amateur hour. Instead, she initiated the "Scorched

Earth" protocol on her personal cloud accounts. She had been the one to set up the family's synchronization, and she had built in a kill switch for her own data.

"Command: REVOKE_ALL_ACCESS . Target: User ID Eulalie_H."

She began the purge. Every photo of her, every email sent from her "Eulalie Holloway" account, every digital footprint linked to the family server vanished. She wasn't deleting their files; she was simply taking hers back, leaving gaping holes in their digital lives.

"Delete. Delete. Delete."

Across town, in the glass tower of Holloway Holdings, Carter, Caden's assistant, frowned at his iPad.

"Boss?" Carter poked his head into the office. "Mrs. Holloway's daily schedule didn't sync this morning. The folder is... empty."

Caden was massaging his temples, hungover. "She's on strike. Ignore it. She'll run out of cash in two days and come crawling back."

He didn't know she had millions in a dark wallet. He didn't know anything.

That evening at 7:00 PM, Eulalie's secure tablet buzzed on the concrete floor.

"Alarm: Remind Elara - Vitamins."

Her hand shot out, grabbing the phone. Muscle memory. Her thumb hovered over the dial button.

She froze.

Usually, she would call. Caden would decline it. She would call the nanny. The nanny would sigh.

She looked out the window at the Boston skyline. The Empire State Building was lit up in blue.

"Not my job," she whispered.

She swiped left. Delete.

Next alarm: Order Caden's antacids. Delete.


Next: Elara Piano Lesson. Delete.

Next: Caden Dry Cleaning. Delete.

Each deletion felt like removing a hook from her flesh. Painful, but leaving her lighter.

At the Penthouse, the clock struck 7:15.

Elara sat at the kitchen island, kicking her legs. "Martha? Where's Mommy? I need her to find my special markers."

Martha looked away, scrubbing a pot too hard. "Your mother... went on a trip, sweetie." 

Elara huffed, crossing her arms. "She's mad because I like Adalynn better. Adalynn says Mommy is too sensitive."

Later that night, Caden came home. His stomach was burning from the stress and the whiskey. He sat on the edge of the bed and reached blindly into the nightstand drawer.

Empty.

He frowned. He yanked the drawer out. No pills.

"Eulalie!" he barked.

Silence.

He remembered. She was gone.

"Dammit," he hissed, standing up and kicking the drawer shut. He marched to the bathroom medicine cabinet, rummaging through expired bottles. "Petty. She's being petty. Let's see how long you last without my credit card."

He walked back downstairs to get water. He passed the foyer sofa. The stack of magazines sat undisturbed. The letter lay beneath them, a silent landmine.

Back in Seaport District, Eulalie sat on the floor, eating a slice of

pepperonipizza. Grease stained her fingers. It was the best thing she had tasted in years.

She wiped her hands and turned back to her isolated monitors. She logged into a dark web developer forum through three proxy servers.

A bounty was posted: "Optimize Karman Algorithm. Reward: \$50k." No one had solved it in months.

Eulalie cracked her knuckles. She typed.

Ten minutes later, the code was compiled. Submitted.

The chat window pinged immediately.

User: ZeroCool: "Holy sht. That syntax... Ghost? Is that you? You've been dead for five years."

Eulalie typed back slowly.

Ghost: "I was asleep. Now I'm awake."

She hit enter. The screen glowed in her dark eyes, reflecting a fire that had been smothered for too long.
