

Chapter 44 No.

The rain didn't wash things clean; it just made the grime slicker. It was 2:00 AM, and the storm was lashing against the windshield of the Porsche with violent intent.

Eulalie gripped the steering wheel, her eyes burning with fatigue. She had spent the last four hours at the ER with Zoe, her college roommate and only friend who had slipped in her bathroom and fractured her ankle. After getting Zoe settled, medicated, and fed, Eulalie was finally heading back to Seaport District.

She stopped at a red light in an industrial district near the Navy Yard. Construction barriers narrowed the road to a single lane. The streetlights were out, leaving the intersection in a pool of darkness.

Suddenly, a figure lurched out from the shadows between two warehouses. The man stumbled toward her car, his movements erratic.

Eulalie's hand instinctively went to the gear shift to speed away, but then the man slammed a hand against her passenger window.

It left a smear of bright red blood.

He leaned his face against the glass, his eyes wild and desperate. He mouthed one word: "Help."

Eulalie hesitated for a fraction of a second. She saw the dark stain spreading on his side. He wasn't attacking; he was dying.

She hit the central unlock button.

Thump.

The passenger door was ripped open.

Before Eulalie could scream, a figure threw himself into the seat. He was soaked, smelling of rain, copper, and fear.

"Drive!" the man rasped.

Eulalie turned her head. A gun—a matte black pistol—was pressed against her ribs.

Her heart hammered a frantic rhythm against her sternum, but her brain, trained in high-pressure algorithmic logic, didn't freeze. It assessed.

Male. 6'0". Injured. Bleeding from the abdomen. Hand shaking. Trigger discipline poor.

"I said drive!" the man shouted, wincing in pain. "To the docks. Now!"

Eulalie didn't scream. Screaming triggered panic responses in attackers. She slowly moved her foot from the brake to the gas.

"Okay," she said, her voice eerily steady. "Put your seatbelt on. The traction control is sensitive in the rain."

The man blinked, water dripping from his hood. He stared at her as if she were speaking a foreign language. "What?"

"Seatbelt," Eulalie repeated, merging the car forward. "If I crash, you bleed out faster. Logic."

The man let out a groan of frustration but awkwardly pulled the belt across his chest with his free hand, keeping the gun trained on her.

Eulalie drove. She kept her eyes on the road, but her peripheral vision was dissecting him. He was wearing a hoodie pulled low, but as he shifted in pain, the hood slipped back.

Blond hair. Sharp jawline. A scar above the left eyebrow.

Eulalie's breath hitched. She knew him.

Harrison Sterling.

Caden's "best friend." The trust-fund brat who had once grabbed her ass at a Christmas party and laughed when she slapped him. The man who laundered money for his father's real estate empire through shell companies Eulalie had once flagged in a compliance audit.

He looked terrible. His face was pale, his lips blue.

"You're bleeding on my Alcantara leather, Harrison," Eulalie said softly.

The gun jerked. "You!" he choked out, his eyes widening in the dim light. "The bitch from the tunnel! What the hell are you doing here?"

"Driving" Eulalie said. She glanced at his wound. A dark stain was spreading across his grey hoodie. "Gunshot?"

"None of your business! Just drive!"

"It looks like a through-and-through," she observed calmly. "Missed the major arteries, you got lucky. But you're losing blood fast. You're going into shock. There's a med-kit in the glove box. Use the clotting gauze."

Harrison stared at her. "You're crazy. I have a gun to your ribs."

"And I'm trying to prevent you from dying in my passenger seat. It's a logistical nightmare for the insurance company."

She reached over—slowly—and popped the glove box. The red kit fell out.

Harrison looked at the kit, then at her. The memory of her cold, precise threats in the tunnel flooded back, amplified by his pain and fear.

"What do you want?" he whispered, his bravado gone.

"For you to not bleed out in my car. And for you to get out at the docks," Eulalie corrected.

They reached the entrance to the docks—the same place where she had seen him harass her and Isla just a week ago. The irony was sharp enough to cut.

"Stop here," Harrison ordered. He grabbed the med-kit, stuffing it into his pocket. "Get out."

Eulalie put the car in park. She turned to face him fully. "No."

"I have a gun!"

"And you can barely hold it," Eulalie said. "You're going into shock, Harrison. If you shoot me, you have to drive yourself. You'll pass out in two blocks and bleed to death or crash. I'm leaving. You are getting out."

Harrison looked at the gun in his hand. It was shaking violently now. He looked at Eulalie's eyes. They were cold, hard, and utterly unafraid.

He realized, with a jolt of terror, that she was right.


He opened the door. The rain roared into the cabin. He stumbled out, nearly falling into a puddle.

"You..." Harrison stammered, clutching his side. "You saved me. Why?"

Eulalie leaned across the seat to pull the door shut.

"Because you owe me now," she said. "And I collect my debts."

She slammed the door.

Harrison stood in the rain, watching the Porsche taillights fade into the storm. He touched the med-kit in his pocket. He realized that the woman he had dismissed as a trophy wife was actually the most dangerous person he had ever met. 

Inside the car, Eulalie drove two blocks, turned a corner, and pulled over. She put the car in park.

Her hands started to shake. Violent, uncontrollable tremors. Her breath came in short, jagged gasps.

Reaction delay. Adrenaline crash.

She reached into the center console, fumbling for a lollipop she kept for Elara. She unwrapped it and shoved it into her mouth. The sugar hit her system. She closed her eyes, forcing her heart rate down.

She had stared down a gun. And she had won.

"Okay," she whispered to the empty car. "Okay."



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