

Chapter 48 No.

The interior of the museum was a sea of black ties and designer gowns. The air buzzed with conversations about IPOs, neural networks, and market caps.

Adalynn had spent twenty minutes in the bathroom trying to blot champagne out of her dress. It was now a sticky, damp mess. She emerged, desperate to reclaim the narrative.

She saw Caden talking to a group of investors. They were ignoring him, looking over his shoulder.

She needed a win. She scanned the room. In the corner, surrounded by a group of admirers, stood Professor Liu. The Nobel laureate. The Godfather of AI.

Adalynn straightened her spine. This was it. She would charm him.

She marched over, pushing through the circle.

"Professor Liu!" she announced, flashing her brightest smile. "I'm Adalynn Pennington. I'm a huge fan of your... computer things."

The circle went quiet. Professor Liu, a man with kind eyes but zero tolerance for fools, looked at her. "Computer things?"

"Yes! The... the internet? And the robots?" Adalynn faltered. "I think AI is so... aesthetic."

Liu blinked. "Aesthetic. I see." He turned back to the person he was talking to.

Adalynn felt the sting of dismissal. She reached out to touch his arm. "I actually have a lot of followers who would love to know about your work. We could collab?"

"Excuse me," a voice cut in. Low. Alto. Commanding.

Eulalie stepped into the circle. She held a tablet.

"Professor Liu," Eulalie said. "I apologize for the interruption. But I was reviewing your paper on recursive deadlock in neural pathways. I believe you missed a variable in the third quadrant."

Liu turned, annoyed at first, then intrigued. "Missed a variable? Impossible."

Eulalie tapped the screen and held it up. "If you apply the CUAP protocol here... the deadlock resolves. It becomes a fluid loop."

Liu stared at the screen. His eyes widened. He grabbed his glasses from his pocket. He looked closer.

"My God," he whispered. "The latency... it drops to zero. Who taught you this?"

"I didn't learn it," Eulalie said simply. "I wrote it."

Liu looked up at her face. Recognition dawned. "You... you are the architect Jory speaks of? The one who built the CUAP protocol from scratch?"

Eulalie put a finger to her lips. "Shh."

"Brilliant!" Liu roared, laughing. "Absolutely brilliant!"

Caden had wandered over, drawn by the commotion. He saw his ex-wife debating math with a genius. He saw Adalynn standing there, looking like a confused child in a costume.

"Eulalie?" Caden asked, stepping up. "What are you talking about? You don't know code."

Liu turned to Caden. "You know this woman?"

"She's my wife," Caden said automatically. "Ex-wife."

"Then you are a fool," Liu said bluntly. "She just solved a problem that has stumped my lab for two years. In five minutes."

Caden stared, the words 'the architect' echoing in his mind. It slammed into him with the force of a physical blow. The CUAP protocol. The

foundational algorithm that had made Holloway Capital's fintech division a titan. His entire success was built on the work of an anonymous coder Jory Stark had represented, a phantom whose services he had secured with an ironclad, multi-million dollar licensing deal. And she was standing right in front of him. His quiet, unassuming wife. The blood drained from his face as five years of memories reconfigured themselves into a terrifying new mosaic. Every late night she'd spent 'organizing charity events' on her laptop, every 'boring technical journal she read... what had she been doing? How could she know this? He felt a dizzying sense of vertigo, as if the floor had dropped out from under him. He hadn't just discarded a wife; he'd alienated a genius.

"You never told me," Caden said, his voice a choked whisper.

"You never asked," Eulalie replied, her eyes cold. "You were too busy explaining the world to me to realize I was the one building it."

Adalynn tugged on Caden's sleeve. "Caden, let's go. This is boring. They're just nerds."

"Quiet, Adalynn," Caden snapped, his eyes locked on Eulalie, filled with a dawning horror and something that felt sickeningly like awe.

Eulalie turned to Liu. "Shall we discuss the implementation over coffee next week?"

"It would be an honor," Liu said, bowing slightly.

Eulalie walked away. She didn't look back at Caden. She left him standing in the wreckage of his own underestimation.