

Chapter 49 No.

The humiliation was too much. Adalynn was vibrating with rage. Her dress was sticky, her ego was bruised and Caden was looking at Eulalie like she was a goddess.

She grabbed Caden's hand and dragged him toward the stage, where Jory Stark was preparing to give his keynote speech.

"You have to do something!" Adalynn hissed. "They rejected me! And now she's mocking me!"

They intercepted Jory at the bottom of the stage steps.

"Stark!" Caden barked, though his voice lacked its usual authority. He was reeling, his mind racing with the implications of what he'd just learned. "We need to talk. Why was Adalynn's application rejected? She's perfect for the brand."

Jory stopped, adjusting his lapel mic. "We went over this, Caden. She's not a fit."

"Is it because of her?" Adalynn pointed a shaking finger at Eulalie, who was standing nearby, watching with a glass of sparkling water. "She's jealous! She's blocking me!"

Quentin Knight, Caden's friend and Adalynn's secondary admirer, stepped out of the crowd. He was drunk on champagne and chivalry.

"Yeah!" Quentin shouted, causing heads to turn. "It's bullying! This woman is vindictive! She's just a bitter ex-wife trying to ruin Adalynn's career!"

The crowd murmured. A spotlight from the stage swept over them, illuminating the confrontation.

Eulalie set her glass down on a passing tray. She walked into the light.

"Career?" Eulalie asked, her voice projecting clearly without a microphone. "Adalynn, you don't have a career. You have a hobby."

"You're a bully!" Quentin yelled. "You're jealous because she's younger and hotter!"

Eulalie laughed. She turned to the crowd. "Quentin here thinks running a tech company is a beauty pageant. Let me clarify."

She turned to Adalynn. "I vetoed you. Yes. Not because I hate you though I do-but because you are incompetent."

"I am not!" Adalynn screamed. "I have millions of fans!"

"Can you write Python?" Eulalie asked.

Adalynn scoffed. "Of course. It's a foundational language for machine learning. Very... scalable."

"Excellent," Eulalie said, a cool smile playing on her lips. She gestured to a nearby waiter, who handed her a cocktail napkin and a pen. "Then please, on this napkin write me a simple 'for loop' to iterate through a list."

Adalynn stared at the napkin as if it were a venomous snake. She opened her mouth, then closed it. "That's... that's ridiculous. I'm a strategist, not a coder."

Eulalie turned to Caden. "This is who you want representing the future of AI? A woman who thinks implementation is beneath her?"

She stepped closer to Adalynn. "Nexus raises eagles, Adalynn. We hunt. We fly. You? You're a canary. You look pretty in a cage, you sing when told, but outside? You get eaten."

The room erupted in laughter and applause. Caden flinched, the public humiliation secondary to the cold dread coiling in his gut.

"Enough" Caden muttered, grabbing Adalynn's arm. "We're leaving."

"But Caden!" Adalynn wailed.

"I said let's go!" Caden dragged her toward the exit.

Quentin stood there, looking foolish. Eulalie winked at him.

"Nice camera work, Quentin," she said. "Make sure you get my good side."

She turned and walked up the stairs to join Jory on stage. She didn't need to say anything else. The victory was absolute.

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