

## Chapter 50 No.

The penthouse was silent except for the sound of Adalynn sobbing. She was lying on the sofa, the massive blue dress puddling around her on the floor like a deflated parachute.

"They laughed at me, Caden!" she cried. "Everyone laughed!"

Caden loosened his tie, pouring himself a whiskey. His head was pounding. "It's over, Adalynn. Just... take the dress off."

"You didn't defend me!"

"I tried! She... she destroyed us." ③

Just then, the house phone rang. It was late. Midnight.

Caden picked it up. "What?" ③

"Sir?" It was Martha, the housekeeper. Her voice was high, panicked. "It's Elara. She's... she's burning up. Her fever is 104. And she can't breathe. The infection's triggered her asthma. The inhaler isn't working." ①

Caden dropped the whiskey glass. It shattered. "What? Did you call 911?"

"Yes! They're on their way!" Martha cried. "But she's turning blue, sir! She's asking for her mom!"

Caden ran into Elara's room. The child was thrashing on the bed, her chest heaving, a terrible whistling sound coming from her throat. ②

"Elara!" Caden shouted. He looked around. Where was the nebulizer? Where were the steroids? He didn't know. He never knew. Eulalie always handled it.

He grabbed his cell phone. His hands shook so hard he dropped it twice. He dialed Eulalie. ⑤

It went straight to voicemail.

"Dammit," Caden hissed. "She blocked me."

He dialed again. And again. Desperate.

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At the Gala after-party, Eulalie was clinking glasses with Jory. Her phone buzzed repeatedly on the table.

She glanced at it. "Blocked Call" - 5 Missed Calls. 4

She frowned. Caden never called this many times unless it was a crisis. 4

Her mother's instinct kicked in. She picked up the phone.

Settings. Blocked Contacts. Caden Holloway. Unblock.

She dialed him back.

"What?" she answered, her voice sharp.

"Elara!" Caden screamed. "The fever... she can't breathe! Martha called the ambulance, but I can't find the meds!" 1

Eulalie didn't ask questions. She dropped her glass. "The nebulizer. Where is it?" 2

"I can't find it! It's not where it's supposed to be!"

"Think, Caden," Eulalie said, her voice dropping to a deadly calm. "Where would Adalynn put something she finds ugly? Something that ruins her aesthetic? Check the storage closets. The hall linen closet. The places you never look."

She hung up. She looked at Jory. "I have to go."

"I'll drive," Jory said.

They tore through the city. Eulalie was still in her velvet gown, barefoot, holding her heels.

By the time they arrived at the penthouse building the ambulance was

already idling at the curb, its lights flashing red and white against the night sky.

Eulalie sprinted into the lobby, past the startled EMTs, and into the elevator.

She burst into the apartment.

Adalynn was sitting on the floor, holding her head. "Caden! Stop shouting My migraine!"

Caden was tearing the room apart. "Shut up, Adalynn!"

Paramedics were already in Elara's room, working over the small figure on the bed.

Eulalie pushed past Caden. She saw the nebulizer on the floor where he'd finally found it. The medic had it plugged in and was holding the mask to Elara's face.

"Breathe, baby," Eulalie whispered, stroking Elara's sweat-drenched hair. "Mommy's here. Look at me. Breathe."

Elara's eyes locked onto Eulalie's. The panic receded. The medicine hissed. Her chest began to rise and fall more rhythmically.

The EMTs rushed in. They took over, checking vitals.

"She's stabilizing," the paramedic said. "We need to take her in for observation."

They loaded Elara onto the stretcher.

Eulalie stood up. She turned to Caden. He looked wrecked. Pale, sweating, useless.

"I'm coming," Caden said, stepping forward.

Eulalie put a hand on his chest. She shoved him back. Hard.

"No," she said.

"She's my daughter!"

Eulalie pointed at Adalynn, who was still whining on the floor about her headache.

"You stay here," Eulalie said, her voice like ice. "Take care of your real priority. She has a headache, remember?"


"Eulalie, please..."

"You had your chance, Caden," Eulalie said, turning to follow the stretcher. "You failed. Tonight, you aren't a father. You're just a liability."

The door slammed shut.

Caden stood in the silence, the sound of the siren fading into the night. He looked at Adalynn. He looked at the empty room. And for the first time,

< Chapter 50 No.

 +120 Points at most

he realized that he had traded a diamond for a piece of glass, and the glass had just cut him deep. 2



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