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< The Ghost Wife's Billion Dollar Tech Comeba...  +120 Points at most

Chapter 53 No.

The water in the rain shower was hot, and the soap was exactly right. It was the bergamot and sandalwood body wash she'd custom-ordered—the one Caden used to bury his face in.

Eulalie scrubbed her skin raw. She washed away the scent of the hospital, the scent of fear, and the lingering phantom smell of Caden's rose-tainted jacket. The ambulance ride and the chaotic intake at the ER felt like a fever dream now that she was back in the safety of her loft.

She stepped out, wrapping a fluffy white towel around herself. The mirror was fogged. She wiped a circle clear with her hand and looked at her reflection. Her eyes were tired, dark circles bruising the skin beneath them, but the fire behind her pupils was unextinguished.

She walked into her spacious, organized walk-in closet. There was no chaos here. No garish colors or scratching sequins. Just rows of perfectly tailored suits, silk blouses, and cashmere sweaters in shades of charcoal, navy, and cream. This was her sanctuary. Her armory.


She bypassed the dresses and formal wear, her fingers gliding over the fabrics until she found it: a pair of tailored grey wool trousers and a crisp white silk blouse. Her uniform. Her armor.

She dressed with methodical precision, the familiar fabric feeling like a second skin. She slipped on a pair of leather loafers, forgoing heels. Today was about speed and stability, not presentation.

As she fastened the clasp on her watch, she caught sight of her reflection in the full-length mirror. This was not Eulalie Holloway, the philanthropist. This was Eulalie Bradford, the Architect. And she was going to war.

Meanwhile, uptown, a groan came from the guest bedroom of the Holloway penthouse.

Caden sat up, blinking blearily. His hair was sticking up in tufts. The room was unfamiliar, colder than the master suite he had shared with Eulalie.

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Adalynn had taken over the master bedroom, claiming she needed the space for her clothes, and he had been relegated to the guest wing.

"Eulalie?" he rasped, his brain struggling to bridge the gap between dream and reality. He looked around, a flicker of hope dying as he remembered. She wasn't here. She was gone. She had taken Elara.

He rubbed his face. He remembered storming out of her loft, the scent of roses clinging to him like a shroud of his own failure.

He threw the covers off and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He was wearing only boxer briefs. He stood, the silence of the apartment pressing in on him. He walked out of the bedroom, a vague, instinctual pull guiding him toward the kitchen.

He expected nothing yet the absence of a familiar morning ritual hit him like a physical blow. The air was still. There was no scent of coffee brewing.

"There's nothing to talk about," he heard her voice echo in his memory. "You failed. I fixed it. That's the summary."

He stumbled to the sleek, marble expanse that she had designed. He opened the cabinet. The beans were there—Ethiopian Yirgacheffe. He poured them into the grinder.

Whirrrrr.

The sound was jarringly loud in the silent house. It didn't sound like home. It sounded like machinery.

He fumbled with the pour-over, his movements clumsy and imprecise. He measured the grounds wrong. The water was too hot.

He poured the resulting brew into a mug. He added two sugars and a splash of oat milk.

He took a sip.

It was sludge. Bitter. Burnt. It tasted like his failure.

He stared at the cup, a dark, twisted thought forming in his mind. She had done this on purpose. She had sabotaged the beans, the water filter, something. It was impossible that he could fail at something so simple.

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