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

## Chapter 54 No.

The morning air was crisp, carrying the scent of fallen leaves and exhaust fumes. But the atmosphere inside Eulalie's Porsche was glacial. She gripped the steering wheel, her phone pressed to her ear, listening to the calm, infuriating voice of her lawyer on the other end.

"He invoked the temporary custody agreement, Eulalie," the lawyer said. "The one you signed during the initial separation filing. It grants him access on weekdays for school runs. Until we get an emergency hearing to revoke it based on last night's events, our hands are tied. If you refuse, you will be in violation of a court order."

"So he can endanger our child's life, and I'm the one who gets punished for trying to protect her?" Eulalie's voice was dangerously low.

"For now, yes. It's a flaw in the system, but it's the system we have to work within. A judge will see the evidence, but it will take a few days. My advice? Let him take her to school. Don't make a scene. It's what he wants. We fight this in the courtroom, not on the sidewalk."

Eulalie's jaw clenched. It was a strategic retreat. A bitter pill to swallow. She had watched Caden's security detail arrive an hour ago, flanked by his attorney, to escort Elara from the loft. She had knelt, looked her daughter in the eyes, and promised her she was just going to school and that Mommy was handling the monsters. But the sight of Elara's small hand disappearing into Caden's had felt like a physical wound.


She had made sure Elara buried her face in a thick scarf, filtering the air, just in case Caden still carried the scent of that perfume.

And so, she sat in her Porsche, idling in the drop-off lane of St. Jude's Academy.

She wasn't dropping anyone off. She was watching.

Beside her in the passenger seat sat Daisy Foster, a six-year-old with pigtails and a missing front tooth. Eulalie had found Daisy's mother, Mrs. Foster—a neighbor from the Seaport District building struggling with a

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dead battery in the garage and had offered to drive Daisy to school. It was a kindness yes, but it was also a tactical maneuver. It gave her a reason to be here without violating any restraining orders Caden might try to conjure up.

"Thanks for the ride, Ms. Bradford," Daisy chirped, swinging her legs. "My mom says your car is a spaceship."

"It's close enough," Eulalie said, her eyes fixed on the rearview mirror.

Three cars back. The Maybach.

It pulled up to the curb.

The back door opened. Elara stepped out. She looked better than she had two nights ago, but she was still pale. She was wearing her uniform, her backpack looking huge on her shoulders.

Then, the front passenger door opened.

Adalynn stepped out.

She was wearing a white Chanel tweed suit that looked impeccable. Her hair was blown out to perfection. She walked around the car, her heels clicking on the pavement, and squatted down next to Elara.

Eulalie lowered her window slightly to hear.

"Okay, sweetie!" Adalynn said, her voice pitched loud enough for the other parents to hear. She reached out and straightened Elara's collar. "Have a magical day! We'll pick you up for froyo later!"

Elara stood stiffly. She didn't lean into Adalynn. She looked like a statue being dusted. She held her breath, turning her face away slightly, a reflex Eulalie had taught her to avoid strong scents.

Caden got out of the driver's side. He stood by the hood, checking his watch, looking important. He gave Elara a quick pat on the head-like one might pat a dog-and then turned his attention to Adalynn.

Adalynn stood up and looped her arm through Caden's. She leaned her head on his shoulder, laughing at something he hadn't even said yet. She looked at the other mothers gathered by the gate, making sure they were watching.

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"Look at them," a woman near Eulalie's car whispered to her friend. "That's the new girlfriend. She seems... involved."

"Very Stepford," the friend replied. "But the kid looks miserable."

Inside the car, Daisy pressed her nose against the glass.

"That's Elara's dad," Daisy said. "And the Mean Lady."

Eulalie turned to look at Daisy. "Mean Lady?"

Daisy nodded vigorously. "Yeah. Elara told me. At recess. She says the Mean Lady acts like a princess when people are looking, but when they get in the car, she puts on her headphones and ignores Elara. And she threw away Elara's drawing because it 'cluttered the console'."

Eulalie's grip on the steering wheel tightened until the leather creaked.

"Daisy," Eulalie said softly. "Did Elara say anything else?"

"She said she misses you," Daisy said. "She said she has to be quiet so Daddy doesn't get mad at the Mean Lady."

Eulalie felt a crack in her heart, but she sealed it instantly with resolve.

Outside, Adalynn spotted Eulalie's Porsche. She couldn't see through the tinted windows, but she recognized the car.

Adalynn stiffened. She whispered something to Caden. Caden looked up, his eyes scanning the line of cars until they landed on the black 911.

Adalynn deliberately turned back to Elara. She grabbed Elara's face with both hands and planted a loud, performative kiss on her cheek.

"Love you!" Adalynn shouted.

Elara pulled away, wiping her cheek. She looked miserable. She glanced toward the street, as if sensing her mother was there.

Eulalie wanted to honk. She wanted to jump out of the car, shove Adalynn into the hedges, and grab her daughter.

But she couldn't. Not yet. A scene here would traumatize Elara and give Caden ammunition for court. Unstable. Harassing.

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"Okay, Daisy," Eulalie said, her voice tight. "Time to go. You don't want to be late."

Daisy opened the door. "Bye, Ms. Bradford! Can you tell Elara you saw her?"

"I will," Eulalie whispered. "Go on."

Daisy hopped out and ran toward the gate. She stopped next to Elara and whispered something in her ear.

Elara's head snapped up. She looked right at the Porsche. Her face lit up with a small, secret smile. She raised her hand and gave a tiny wave.

Eulalie waved back behind the tinted glass, tears stinging her eyes.

She put the car in gear. As she pulled out, she drove slowly past the Maybach.

Caden was watching her. He looked angry. He looked possessive. But mostly, he looked unsettled. The perfect family tableau Adalynn was trying to paint was cracking and he knew Eulalie was the one holding the hammer.

Eulalie hit the gas. The engine roared, a guttural sound of defiance, leaving the fake family in her rearview mirror.

She wasn't going home to cry. She was going to work.

 "Help me, and I'll give you a special reward!" Check