Chapter 58 No.

5:15 PM at Nexus AI.

The atmosphere was electric. The entire team was gathered around the main dashboard screen.

Eulalie hit the Enter key.

DEPLOYING PATCH 2.1...

A progress bar appeared.

COMPILING...

Su was biting his nails. Jory was holding his breath.

TESTING MODULE 1... PASS.

A green bar appeared.

TESTING MODULE 2... PASS.

TESTING MODULE 3... PASS.

The bars filled the screen, a cascading waterfall of green. Green meant good. Green meant money. Green meant victory.

STRESS TEST: 10,000 CONCURRENT USERS.

LATENCY: 12ms.

STATUS: STABLE.

ALL SYSTEMS GO.

The room erupted.

"Yes!" Su shouted, punching the air. "Twelve milliseconds! That's faster than before!"

+120 Points at most

The engineers broke into applause. It wasn't polite applause. It was the raucous, adrenaline-fueled cheering of people who had just survived a disaster. They turned to Eulalie.

"How did you know?" one asked. "The pointer logic?"

Eulalie spun her chair around. She looked tired but exhilarated. Her hair was coming loose from its bun. She smiled.

"I wrote the kernel," she said. "I know where the bodies are buried."

Jory walked over and handed her a bottle of water. "Ghost is back."

"Eulalie," she corrected, taking the water.

"Okay, team!" Jory shouted. "Drinks on me! We're going to celebrate. Le Bernardin. I got us a table."

"Le Bernardin?" Su's eyes widened. "That's impossible to get into."

"Not when you just saved the company," Jory grinned. "Eulalie, you coming?"

Eulalie hesitated. She checked her phone. A text from her nanny, who had arrived an hour ago.

Nanny: She's eating soup. Watching cartoons. Fever is normal. Go have fun, Ma'am. You've earned it.

Eulalie felt the tension in her shoulders release.

"Yes," she said. "I'm coming."

An hour later, Eulalie walked out of the building surrounded by her new team. She was laughing at a joke Su made about a semicolon. She felt light. She felt seen.

Across the street, a black sedan was parked.

Caden sat in the driver's seat, watching.

He saw Eulalie walking with Jory. He saw Jory put a hand on her back to guide her into the Uber. He saw Eulalie smile-a real, radiant smile that Caden hadn't seen in years.

+120 Points at most

Jealousy, hot and irrational, flooded his veins.

She was supposed to be miserable. She was supposed to be struggling without his money, without his status.

Instead, she looked like a queen.

And she was with Jory Stark.

Caden grippedthe steering wheel until his leather gloves creaked.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," he whispered.