

## Chapter 64 No.

The morning sun hit the glass facade of the Pennington residence—a temporary rental in the Upper East Side that cost more per month than a small island.

Adalynn stood in front of a full-length mirror. She was wearing a silver dress that looked like liquid mercury. It was backless, tight, and screamed "look at me."

She twirled.

"What do you think, Daddy?" she asked.

Grady sat on a velvet sofa, sipping espresso.

"It's perfect, Adalynn. You look like a visionary."

Adalynn beamed. "Caden says I need to look like the face of the future. When I walk onto that stage at the Summit, I want everyone to forget that boring ex-wife of his ever existed."

She walked over to a table where a thick, bound document lay. The cover read: *Neural Network Optimization for Consumer Retail*. By Adalynn Pennington.

She ran her hand over the cover.

"Do you think Professor Liu will like it?" she asked, a hint of nervousness in her voice.

Grady waved a dismissive hand. "He's an academic, Adalynn. They love money. Caden is donating five million to his lab. He'll love whatever you hand him. Besides, the ghostwriter we hired is from MIT. It's good stuff."

Adalynn nodded, reassured. "I just... I need this to work. Caden has been so stressed. He keeps talking about this 'Ghost' at Nexus."

"Let him worry about the business," Grady said. "You just be the star."

"That's your job."

Meanwhile, in Seaport District, the morning was less glamorous but more productive.

Eulalie was packing Not a silver dress, but thick wool sweaters, thermal leggings and her heavy-duty snow boots.

Elara sat on the bed, watching.

"Are we going to the snow?" Elara asked, eyes wide.

"Yes," Eulalie said. "But it's a secret mission."

The doorbell rang.

Eulalie stiffened. She checked the monitor. It was Jared, Caden's chief of staff. He looked uncomfortable.

She buzzed him up.

Jared stood in the doorway, holding a manila envelope.

"Ms. Bradford," he said, avoiding eye contact. "Mr. Holloway asked me to drop this off. It's... well, it's a ticket for the Summit. For Elara. He wants her to see him receive the 'Innovator of the Year' award."

Eulalie took the envelope. She opened it. Inside was a VIP pass for a child.

"And where is she supposed to sit?" Eulalie asked.

"With... Ms. Pennington," Jared mumbled.

Eulalie laughed. It was a sharp, humorless sound.

"So he wants his daughter to watch his mistress play stepmom in front of the press?"

Jared shifted his weight. "I'm just the messenger, Ma'am."

Elara ran into the room. She was holding a piece of paper.

"Hi Jared!" she chirped.

"Hello, Elara."

Elara shoved the paper at him. "Give this to Daddy."

Jared took it. It was a drawing. It showed a stick figure with long black hair (Eulalie) holding a giant sword, standing on top of a castle. Below, a stick figure with blonde hair (Adalynn) was falling into a moat filled with crocodiles. A smaller stick figure (Caden) was running away.

"Tell him Mommy is the hero," Elara said seriously.

Jared looked at the drawing, then at Eulalie. A small, almost imperceptible smile tugged at his lips.

"I'll make sure he gets it, Elara."

He turned to leave.

"Oh, Jared?" Eulalie called out.

He paused. "Yes?"

"Tell Caden that if he wants Elara at the Summit, he can ask me himself. And tell him... tell him the Ghost says hello."

Jared frowned, confused by the open acknowledgement, but nodded. He left.

Eulalie closed the door. She looked at Elara.

"The hero?" Eulalie asked, amused.

Elara nodded. "In the stories. The hero always wins. Daddy thinks he's the hero, but he's just standing there while the monster steals the princess."

Eulalie burst out laughing. She grabbed Elara and hugged her tight.

"Where did you learn that?"

"From my books," Elara giggled.

Eulalie kissed her forehead.

"You're right baby. And we're about to rewrite his story."

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