

Chapter 68 No.

Sunday morning The day of the pre-summit brunch

Caden was pacing in the living room of the chalet.

"She's here," he said to Jared, his Chief of Staff. "I saw her. Last night At the Caribou Club."

Jared looked up from his tablet. "Are you sure? The PI said her digital trail was a smokescreen, but her physical presence was confirmed in Seaport District until Saturday morning"

"The PI is an idiot," Caden snapped. "It was her. And she was with... him. That old man."

"Professor Liu?" Jared asked.

Caden stopped pacing. The blood drained from his face.

"Liu? Yes. Why would she be with Liu? He knows who she is. He was at the Nexus event."

"Unless..." Jared hesitated. "Unless she's showing him something. Something new."

Caden grabbed his coat.

"We need to find her. Now. If she gets to Liu before Adalynn does..."

Adalynn walked in, wearing a pink ski suit.

"Who are we finding?" she asked.

"No one," Caden said quickly. "Just business"

Adalynn frowned. "You promised we'd go skiing. The photographers are waiting at the bottom of the gondola."

"Adalynn, I can't. I have to handle this."

Adalynn stomped her foot. A literal stomp.

"You are ruining my content schedule! This trip is about us! About me!"

Caden looked at her. Really looked at her.

She was beautiful, yes. But she was... vacuous.

In that moment, he remembered Eulalie sitting at her desk, hair messy, glasses on, debating the ethics of AI with him until 2 AM.

He missed that.

He shook his head, pushing the thought away.

"Fine," Caden said. "One run. Then I have to work."

Adalynn squealed and clapped her hands. "Yay! You're the best!"

They went to the mountain.

The paparazzi were there, tipped off by Adalynn.

Caden forced a smile as Adalynn posed, leaning on her skipoles, blowing kisses to the camera.

Meanwhile, in the small rental cabin, Eulalie was watching the live stream on her phone.

Tech Mogul Caden Holloway and Girlfriend Adalynn Pennington Hit the Slopes in Aspen!

The headline flashed across the screen.

Eulalie sat on the couch, Elara next to her.

"Is that Daddy?" Elara asked, pointing at the screen.

"Yes," Eulalie said.

"Why is he smiling?" Elara asked. "He looks like he's in a toothpaste commercial."

Eulalie laughed. "That's his 'public' smile."

Elara watched for a moment, then turned away.

"It looks fake. Like the plastic fruit in the diningroom."

Eulalie turned off the phone.

"It is fake, baby."

She looked at her watch.

Professor Liu would have checked the code by now.

Her phone buzzed.

UnknownNumber.

She answered.

"Hello?"

"It's garbage," Liu's voice barked.

Eulalie's heart stopped. "What?"

"The interface," Liu said. "The GUI is garbage. It's ugly. But the kernel..."

He paused.

"The kernel is poetry, Bradford. Absolute poetry."

Eulalie let out a breath, her knees weak.

"So... it works?"

"Works?" Liu scoffed. "It sings. I haven't seen architecture this elegant since... well, since I wrote the Omni-Protocol in '98."

Eulalie smiled, tears pricking her eyes.

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me. Just make sure you're at the Summit tomorrow. I'm scrapping my keynote speech."

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 +120 Points at most

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to talk about you."


The line went dead.

Eulalie stared at the phone.

She looked at Elara.

"Pack your bags, little soldier," Eulalie said, her voice trembling with excitement. "We're going to the main event."



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