

## Chapter 69 No.

Sunday. The Global Tech Summit. Aspen, Colorado.

The St. Regis Summit Hall was a hive of activity. Thousands of attendees, journalists, and investors swarmed the floor.

Backstage, Caden was adjusting his tie. He was sweating.

Adalynn stood next to him, clutching her bound report.

"I'm nervous," she whispered.

"You'll be fine," Caden said, though he didn't believe it. "Just smile and say the buzzwords. 'Synergy', 'Paradigm shift', 'Neural integration'."

Adalynn nodded, mouthing the words.

Out in the audience, in the front row, sat Professor Liu. He sat with his arms crossed, looking bored.

Caden walked onto the stage. The applause was polite.

"Thank you," he said into the microphone. "Today, Holloway Holdings is proud to announce a new era. An era of innovation."

He gestured to the screen behind him. The Holloway logo appeared.

"We are acquiring new technologies. We are expanding. And leading this charge is our new Chief Visionary Officer, Adalynn Pennington."

Adalynn walked out. She waved.

The applause was... sparse.

Adalynn took the mic.

"Thank you, Caden! At Holloway, we believe in leveraging synergistic paradigms to achieve next-generation consumer integration. My paper outlines a revolutionary approach to quantum-entangled retail..."

A murmur went through the crowd. This was a room full of PhDs and engineers. They recognized the empty jargon.

Professor Liu stood up.

The room went silent. When Liu stood, people listened.

"Ms. Pennington," Liu boomed, his voice carrying without a mic.

Adalynn froze. "Yes?"

"I have read your 'paper,'" Liu said, holding up the bound document she had sent him.

Adalynn smiled nervously. "Did you like it?"

"It is a fascinating work of theoretical fiction," Liu declared. "Your core algorithm is not only a derivative of the original CUAP protocol, it's a mathematically unsound one. Your proposed 'quantum entanglement' would create a recursive data loop that would bankrupt any company foolish enough to implement it."

The crowd gasped.

Caden stepped forward. "Professor, please--"

Liu ignored him. "Your work demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of the very principles you claim to champion. It is an insult to this institution and to every innovator in this room."

Adalynn turned red. "That's not true! My team wrote it!"

"Your team?" Liu raised an eyebrow. "I thought you were the visionary?"

Adalynn looked at Caden, panic in her eyes. "Caden, do something!"

Caden opened his mouth, but Liu cut him off.

"Mr. Holloway, you claim to value innovation. Yet you parade this... charade... while the true architect of your success sits in this very room. You all know Ms. Bradford is the Architect. But you have been operating under the assumption that her past work is her only legacy. You are mistaken. Today, you will witness the obsolescence of an entire ecosystem."

Liu turned to the side of the stage.

He didn't point. He simply looked toward the guest speaker entrance.

"The architect of the original CUAP protocol, and the owner of the far superior CUAP 2.0, is with us today."

The curtains parted.

Eulalie walked out.

She wasn't wearing a ballgown. She wasn't wearing a ski suit.

She was wearing a sharp, black suit. Her hair was down. She looked powerful.

The crowd murmured. Investors were already pulling out their phones. The atmosphere shifted from academic debate to financial panic.

Eulalie walked to the center of the stage. She took the mic from a stunned Adalynn.

"Hello, Caden," she said.

Caden stared at her. He felt like the floor was opening up beneath him. He knew this was coming but the public execution was more brutal than he had ever imagined.

Eulalie turned to the audience.

"My name is Eulalie Bradford," she said, her voice steady and clear. "And while Professor Liu is correct that I am the Ghost, that is old news."

She signaled to the tech booth.

The screen behind her changed.

It didn't show a logo. It showed two columns of performance metrics.

"On the left, you see the performance of CUAP 1.0, the protocol currently licensed by Holloway Holdings. On the right, CUAP 2.0. As of this morning when my Poison Pill protocol was activated, version 1.0 has been rendered obsolete. Its security is compromised, its speed is throttled, and any attempt to integrate it with new systems will result in

catastrophic data corruption.

The room erupted. Investors started shouting questions. Flashbulbs went off like a strobe light.

Caden stood there, stripped of his narrative, stripped of his power.

He looked at Adalynn. She was crying her mascara running

He looked at Eulalie. She wasn't looking at him. She was looking at the audience, commanding the room.

She was the sun. And he was just a planet, burning up in her orbit.