

Chapter 72 No.

The flight back to New York was a pressurized chamber of silent fury. Caden's private jet, usually a stage for celebration and seduction, now felt like a gilded cage hurtling through a storm. Below, the country was a dark, unfeeling map. Inside, the war had already begun.

Adalynn had stopped crying. Her face, scrubbed of its ruined makeup, was set in a mask of vengeful fury. She was furiously typing on her phone, her thumbs flying across the screen. She wasn't texting her father or her friends. She was contacting a publicist known for dirty work.

"They're calling her a genius," Adalynn spat, reading a comment on a live feed. "They're calling her the visionary. After everything I did!"

"What did you do, Adalynn?" Caden asked, his voice dangerously quiet. He was staring out the window, but he wasn't seeing the clouds. He was seeing lines of code. He was seeing Eulalie's face, illuminated by a monitor, looking more alive than he'd ever seen her at any of his galas.

"I built the brand! I gave AI a heart!" she insisted, reciting the empty soundbites that now felt like ash in her mouth. "The empathetic user interface... the digital best friend... that was all me!"

"That was marketing," Caden corrected, turning to face her. "That was interior decorating. She was the structural engineer. Liu was right."

The mention of Professor Liu's public rebuke sent a fresh wave of humiliation through Adalynn. "Liu is a bitter old man! And she's a thief! She stole your ideas, Caden! She lived in your house, used your resources, and she stabbed you in the back!"

Caden almost laughed. My ideas? He thought, a cold dread washing over him. I don't have ideas. I have instincts. I find people with ideas and I buy them. And the most valuable one of all, I had for free. And I threw her away for... this. For a shiny plastic bead.

His phone buzzed. It was Jared, his chief of staff. "Sir, the board is demanding a response. The stock is in a nosedive. The Poison Pill wasn't

just a threat; it's a cascading failure. Any system running CUAP 1.0 that pings the Nexus servers for verification is being permanently locked out. We're not just blind; we're crippled."

"Tell them my response is a lawsuit," Caden commanded. "Frame her as a vindictive ex-wife who stole proprietary code developed on my dime. We'll bury her in discovery. We'll bleed her dry."

"And the media?" Jared asked, his voice strained. "She's being hailed as a hero. A woman who broke free."

"Then we change the story," Caden said, his eyes flicking to Adalynn. "We make her a villain. An adulterer. A fraud."

Adalynn looked up from her phone, a slow, malicious smile spreading across her face. "I've already started," she said. "By tomorrow, no one will be talking about her code. They'll be talking about who she's sleeping with."