

Chapter 73 No.

The Nexus AI headquarters on the 40th floor of One World Trade was a beacon of controlled calm against the night sky. From this height the city was a sprawling circuit board of light, a silent testament to the very systems they were now fighting to control. It smelled of ozone, strong coffee, and the future being written in real-time.

Eulalie stood before a wall of monitors, a sea of green and black data streams. She was holding not a glass of champagne, but a ceramic mug of tea. She was tracking the deployment of CUAP 2.0, watching as their new, secure protocol was adopted by clients jumping ship from Holloway Capital's dying system.

Jory walked in, holding a tablet. He didn't look triumphant. He looked grim.

"It's filed," he said, placing the tablet on the central console. "The lawsuit. Exactly as you predicted. Breach of fiduciary duty, patent infringement... the works."

Eulalie didn't turn from the screens. "They're trying to stop a bullet that's already hit the target. The 1.0 system is obsolete. The market has already decided."

"This isn't about the market, Lali," Jory said, using her old nickname. "This is about Caden trying to destroy you personally. He's going to subpoena your emails, your texts, your financials for the last five years. He wants to paint a picture of a kept woman who stole the family silver on her way out the door."

Eulalie finally turned. Her eyes were calm. It was the calm of a grandmaster who sees the entire board, not just the next move.

"Let him," she said. "He thinks he's investigating a housewife. He's about to run into an architect."

She picked up her phone and dialed her lead attorney. "Helen, it's Eulalie Bradford. The Holloway suit just dropped... Yes, I expected it. I'm sending

you a file now. It's the incorporation and patent assignment from a shell entity I established for the core CUAP architecture."

She paused, listening. "That's right. The filing date is six years ago. The entity name is innocuous but I am the sole proprietor. All IP was assigned to it long before my marriage. Yes, a premarital asset. I want you to file a countersuit for malicious prosecution and defamation. And file a motion to dismiss their injunction based on prior art. My art."

Jory's eyebrows shot up. He knew she owned the IP, but he hadn't realized she'd had the foresight to shield it with such sophisticated legal armor.

"You knew," Jory said, a note of awe in his voice. "Even back then, you knew you had to protect it from him."

"I didn't know I had to protect it from him," Eulalie corrected softly, her gaze distant. "I knew I had to protect it for myself. I learned early on that the things you create are the only things no one can ever truly take from you. Caden thought he owned me. He never even thought to ask if he owned my work."

The door to the office opened and a young engineer peeked in, her face pale. "Eulalie... Jory... you need to see this."

She turned a monitor toward them. It wasn't a news article from a tech journal. It was the homepage of TMZ. The headline was large, lurid, and accompanied by a paparazzi photo of Eulalie and Jory leaving the St. Regis in Aspen, caught in a moment where they were leaning close to talk.

"SILICON SCANDAL: Tech's New Queen in Secret Affair with Business Partner? Sources Claim Jilted Husband Caden Holloway Was Blindsided."

Jory swore under his breath. "Adalynn," he hissed.

Eulalie stared at the headline. The legal attack was one thing. That was business. This was different. This was an attempt to erase her intellect and reduce her, once again, to a woman defined by the men around her.

"Change the story," Caden had said. And his plastic bead had obeyed.