

Chapter 78 No.

The trading floor at Holloway Capital was a bloodbath. The vibrant symphony of commerce had been replaced by a cacophony of panic. Red numbers cascaded down every screen. The Poison Pill hadn't just been a shutdown; it was a scorched-earth campaign.

The CUAP 1.0 system wasn't just offline; it was actively rejecting any attempt at a workaround. Eulalie had designed it so that the core of Caden's automated trading bots, which relied on the Nexus data feed for millisecond-level market analysis, were now worse than useless. They were actively executing flawed trades based on corrupted, lagging data. 

Caden stood on the glass-walled mezzanine overlooking the floor, watching his empire burn. Every frantic shout, every slammed phone was a testament to his failure.

Grady Pennington stood beside him, his face the color of old parchment. "We've lost nine figures since the market opened," he whispered, his voice hoarse. "The margin calls are starting. Our investors... they're calling it a 'crisis of confidence.' They're pulling out, Caden."

A crisis of confidence. That was the core of it. Caden didn't sell technology; he sold certainty. He sold the idea that he was smarter, faster, and always one step ahead. Eulalie hadn't just crashed his system; she had crashed his myth.

"Get our engineers working on a new protocol," Caden ordered, his voice strained. "Reverse-engineer what she did. Build our own 2.0."

"They've tried!" Grady exclaimed, his voice cracking. "They said it's not that simple. Her architecture is fundamentally different. It's like... we've been building with bricks and she just invented steel. They say it would take them a year, maybe more, to create something comparable."

A year. In this market, a year was an eternity. He would be a footnote in a history book by then.

His phone rang. It was his lead lawyer. "Bad news, Caden. Her legal team

filed a motion to dismiss. They attached the patent filings."

"They're forgeries," Caden snapped.

"They're not," the lawyer said grimly. "We've verified them. Filed six years ago. Ironclad. Our infringement claim is dead on arrival. Worse, they've countersued. Malicious prosecution. The judge is likely to grant it."

Caden felt the floor drop out from under him. The legal attack, his primary weapon, had just been turned against him.

"And there's more," the lawyer continued, his voice hesitant. "TMZ is running a new story. A follow-up. Someone leaked a copy of Adalynn Pennington's disciplinary hearing from Stanford. The plagiarism charge."

Caden closed his eyes. Adalynn's tacky media war had backfired, making her an unreliable narrator and casting doubt on their entire story.

He had no technical advantage. He had no legal advantage. And he was losing the public relations war. He was cornered, bleeding, and running out of moves.

He looked down at the chaos on the trading floor. He had built all of this on a foundation of control. Now, for the first time in his life, he had none.

But he had one thing left. One last point of leverage. Not an asset he could find on a balance sheet, but the one thing he and Eulalie had created together.

His daughter. 🧡