

## Chapter 8 No.

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A crack of thunder shook the Boston skyline. Rain lashed against the massive industrial windows of the Loft.

Eulalie bolted upright in bed, gasping.

Thunder.

Elara was terrified of thunder. Since she was two, she would scream until she vomited unless Eulalie held her and sang "Golden Slumbers."

Eulalie grabbed her phone. She paced the room, the concrete cold under her bare feet.

She dialed the landline. It rang three times before a groggy voice answered.

"Holloway residence," the voice mumbled.

"Who is this?" Eulalie asked, her heart racing.

"I'm Sarah, the temp nanny. Who's calling at this hour?"

"Sarah? Is Elara okay? The storm..."

"Mrs. Holloway?" Sarah yawned. "Uh, Mr. Holloway is in there with her. He's... shouting a bit. Trying to get her to stop crying."

Eulalie's blood ran cold. Caden didn't have patience. He yelled when he was stressed.

"Put her on. Please." 📞

"I can't, ma'am. He took everyone's phones. He said... he said you're harassing the family since you quit your job and caused a scene."

Harassing.

0.0%

10:47 📶

"Just check on her," Eulalie begged. "Tell her... tell her the thunder is just clouds high-fiving."

"I... I can't. Goodnight."

Click.

Eulalie stood in the dark, the lightning illuminating her silhouette. She felt like an animal trapped in a cage. She threw the phone onto the mattress. It bounced harmlessly.

In the Penthouse, Elara was sobbing into her pillow. Caden stood in the doorway, looking disheveled and furious.

"It's just noise, Elara! Grow up!" he shouted over a clap of thunder. "Your mother isn't here to baby you! Stop it!"

Elara choked on a sob, burying her head deeper.

The next morning The rain had stopped.

Eulalie stood before her computer. She opened the schedule for the Tech Summit.

Day 1: Keynote Speech - Nexus AI.

She circled it with her mouse cursor.

She opened the chat with Jory.

Ghost: "Change of plans. I'm not just attending. I want to be on stage."

Jory: "Whoa. Are you sure? That's... a declaration of war."

Ghost: "Holloway Holdings is going to be there looking for a savior. I want them to see exactly who they threw away."

Jory: "I love it. I'll prep the demo. Welcome home, boss."

Eulalie walked to the garment rack. The Yves Saint Laurent suit hung there, black as midnight.

She ran her fingers over the silk lapel.

She wasn't a mother today. She wasn't a wife. She was a weapon.

She went to the bathroom mirror. She pulled out a temporary tattoo she had bought—a small, geometric butterfly. She applied it to the inside of her wrist, right over her pulse point.

It was a symbol. Transformation.

She looked at her eyes. They were cold, clear. The woman who begged for phonecalls at 3 AM was gone.

"Let's go," she said to her reflection.

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