

Chapter 81 No.

The silence in her Seaport District loft was absolute, a stark contrast to the noise of the past forty-eight hours. The chaos of Aspen, the silent flight back, the adrenaline of the launch—it had all faded, leaving behind the cold, clear reality of the war she had started. The initial shockwave had passed. Now came the painstaking work of securing the territory she had won.

Her phone buzzed. It was Helen, her lead attorney. The woman's voice was like polished granite—smooth, hard, and incapable of being chipped.

"The filing is in," Helen said, her tone devoid of celebration. It was the sound of a box being checked on a long, bloody list. "The motion to dismiss their injunction citing your premarital IP patents, has been submitted. And our countersuit for malicious prosecution is officially on the record."

"Good," Eulalie said, her gaze fixed on the sprawling city below. It looked like a circuit board from this height, a system she now understood better than anyone.

"There's more," Helen continued. "Caden's team just filed an emergency motion for a custody hearing. He's petitioning for sole custody of Elara."

The circuit board outside blurred. Eulalie's knuckles went white around her phone. She had anticipated it, had known it was his only remaining move, but hearing the words still felt like a physical blow.

"On what grounds?" she asked, her voice dangerously quiet.

"The usual," Helen replied with a sigh of professional weariness. "Unstable new lifestyle, 'volatile business environment,' 'questionable associations'—that's a thinly veiled reference to the affair rumors Adalynn has been planting. They're going to paint you as a work-obsessed, absentee mother who has suddenly thrown her child's life into chaos for personal ambition."

Eulalie closed her eyes. He was turning her greatest strength—her work-

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into a weapon against her. He was trying to make her choose between her creation and her child.

"He won't win," Eulalie stated. It wasn't a hope; it was a command.

"He doesn't have to win, Eulalie," Helen countered gently. "He just has to drag you through hell. Family court is a meat grinder. He'll subpoena your emails, your travel schedule, Jory's financials. He will try to prove that Nexus AI is more important to you than Elara."

"He's made a mistake," Eulalie said, her voice hardening with a resolve that chilled the air. "He thinks he's fighting a CEO for custody. He's about to find out he's fighting a mother for her child. Helen, I'm authorizing the full budget. Hire the forensic accountants, the investigators. I want to know everything about Adalynn Pennington's finances, her father's. Every dollar from that 'charity donation' to Stanford. Caden wants to talk about what's best for my daughter? Let's start by exposing the criminals he's chosen to surround himself with."

She hung up the phone, the silence of the loft pressing in on her again. The war wasn't about code anymore. It was about character. And she was about to prove whose was written in stone.



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