

Chapter 83 No.

The war of information was fought in pixels and headlines. Adalynn, desperate to regain relevance, doubled down. She fed a friendly gossip columnist a new, more insidious story, complete with carefully cropped photos from years past—Eulalie and Jory at a conference, laughing a dinner with investors where they sat next to each other. The accompanying text was pure poison, suggesting a long, clandestine emotional affair that had culminated in corporate treason.

The story was flimsy, but it was designed to muddy the waters, to plant a seed of doubt. It ran under the headline: "Tech Queen's Takeover: Years in the Making?"

In the Nexus AI headquarters, the mood was tense. The article was displayed on the main monitor in the conference room, an ugly stain on their victory.

"This is character assassination," Jory said, his voice tight with a rage he rarely showed. "She's painting you as a manipulative schemer and me as... God knows what. We have to issue a denial. A cease and desist."

Eulalie stared at the screen, her expression unreadable. She took a slow sip of her tea. "No," she said calmly. "A denial is defensive. It gives the accusation oxygen. We will not respond. We will overwhelm."

She stood and walked to the whiteboard, picking up a marker. "They are attacking us with whispers and innuendo. We will counter them with irrefutable, catastrophic truth."

She turned to her head of communications. "I am authorizing the full, unredacted release of the CUAP 1.0 security audit. Not just to the tech journals. Send it to every major news outlet. The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, ProPublica. Frame it for what it is: a national security threat. Holloway Capital's software is running in our power grids, our financial markets, our infrastructure. And its creator deliberately built in backdoors for his own leverage."

A murmur went through the room. This was escalating beyond a

corporate dispute.

"They want to talk about betrayal?" Eulalie continued, her voice ringing with cold fury. "Let's talk about Caden Holloway betraying the trust of every single client he ever had. Let's talk about the data he mined, the privacy he violated. We won't say he's a bad husband. We'll prove he's a threat to the public."

Just then, her phone chimed. An encrypted message from a number she didn't recognize. The text was brief.

They're not just digging into Stark. They're looking for your grandfather. - H.S.

Eulalie's blood ran cold. Harrison Sterling. Caden wasn't just looking for dirt on Jory. He was digging into her past, into the one area of her life that was a wasteland of pain and shame. Her grandfather, Delmar Bradford, the brilliant but disgraced patriarch who had lost the family fortune and vanished into seclusion years ago. Caden was looking for a ghost of his own to use against her.

She erased the whiteboard with a single, decisive swipe. The plan had changed.

"Jory," she said, her voice strained. "Get Helen on the phone. Tell her we're moving up the timeline. I want to file for a summary judgment. And..." she took a deep breath, the decision solidifying like ice in her veins. "I'm going to give an interview. A real one. On the record. To someone Caden can't buy or intimidate."

She was done letting others tell her story. The Ghost was about to speak.

