

Chapter 89 No.

The courtroom was a theater of quiet warfare. The preliminary custody hearing was not about love or family; it was about leverage and optics. Eulalie sat at one table with Helen, her posture perfect, her expression a mask of calm control. Caden sat at the other, his expensive suit looking more like armor than clothing.

Helen was methodical, brutal. She presented the evidence with surgical precision. She submitted Caden's threatening texts. She detailed the smear campaign launched by Adalynn, establishing a pattern of harassment. She introduced the restraining order, framing Caden as volatile and aggressive. Then she presented the financials—the nosediving stock, the mass liquidation of assets.

"Your Honor," Helen said, her voice filling the hushed room. "Mr. Holloway has created an environment of extreme instability. His company is in freefall due to his own actions. He has engaged in a public campaign to destroy Ms. Bradford's reputation. This is not the behavior of a parent acting in the best interest of his child. This is the behavior of a man lashing out as his empire crumbles."

Caden's lawyer, a slick operator named Marcus Thorne, fought back. He tried to paint Eulalie as a cold, ambitious workaholic. He presented her travel schedule, her long hours. He brought up the new, massive DARPA contract.

"Ms. Bradford is now the CEO of a major defense contractor," Thorne argued. "Her life is a whirlwind of high-stakes meetings and international travel. What time does that leave for a five-year-old girl? Caden, for all his current business challenges, can provide one thing Eulalie cannot: stability. A quiet, secure home, away from the chaos she has chosen."

The judge, a woman in her sixties with eyes that had seen every form of human misery, listened patiently. She looked at Eulalie.

"Ms. Bradford," the judge said. "Your ex-husband's counsel raises a valid point. Your career has changed dramatically. How do you intend to

balance these new responsibilities with the needs of your daughter?"

Eulalie stood. She did not look at Caden. She spoke directly to the judge.

"Your Honor, for five years, I was the sole caregiver for my daughter while my husband built his empire. I balanced my work—the work that created the very technology we are discussing—with every school pickup, every doctor's visit, every sleepless night. I did it from a home office, in stolen hours, because that was the only way. The difference now is that I no longer have to steal the time. I own it."

She gestured to the evidence file. "My new contract does not require more travel; it requires more security. My headquarters is ten minutes from my daughter's school. I have built a company that allows me to be both a CEO and a mother, because I learned long ago that no one was going to give me that permission. I had to create it myself. My success does not take me away from my daughter. It secures her future."

She paused, her voice dropping slightly. "My husband argues that he can provide stability. The evidence shows he is the primary source of instability in our lives. He is right about one thing. Our daughter needs to be shielded from this chaos. Which is why she needs to be with me."

The judge looked at Caden, then back at Eulalie. She picked up her gavel.

"The temporary restraining order will remain in effect," she declared. "Temporary primary physical custody is awarded to the mother, Ms. Bradford. Mr. Holloway is granted supervised visitation twice a week. We will schedule a full psychiatric evaluation for both parents and the child. This court is adjourned."

The gavel fell like an executioner's axe. Caden stared, unseeing as Eulalie stood, collected her papers, and walked out of the courtroom, a victor in a war he never should have started.



Congratulations! You've won
30 minutes of free reading time!

Claim Now