

Chapter 91 No.

The drive back to Seaport District was a blur of gray concrete and rain-streaked glass. The words echoed in the silent car, her own voice haunting her. Nobody wins this. She had won. By every legal and financial metric, she had achieved total victory. But it felt like ash in her mouth. She had dismantled the man who was her daughter's father, and the victory felt strangely like a loss.

She let herself into the loft. The silence here was different from the crushing silence of the courthouse hallway. It was peaceful. She walked past the monitors in her office, their glow holding no appeal, and went straight to Elara's room. Her daughter was asleep, her small face serene, the stuffed rabbit clutched under her chin. This. This was what was real. This was the kingdom she had fought for.

An hour later, after the weight in her chest had settled into a familiar, grim resolve, she sat down at her monitors. The digital clock read 2:14 AM. She was methodically dismantling Caden's legacy, line by line, ensuring every digital ghost was exorcised from the system before the market opened in four hours.

The heavy walnut door to her apartment remained shut against the night.

At 6:00 AM, the sky outside was a bruised purple. Eulalie closed her laptops. Her eyes felt gritty, like she had rubbed sand into them. She stood up, her joints stiff from hours of immobility, and walked to the kitchen. The routine was a lifeline. Coffee. A green smoothie. Toast. The sounds of breakfast were the only normal thing in a life that had been meticulously rebuilt from the ground up.

Elara came into the kitchen twenty minutes later, dragging her stuffed rabbit by the ear. She rubbed her eyes, her hair a bird's nest of tangles. She climbed onto the stool at the island and looked around the gleaming, unfamiliar kitchen.

"Mommy," she said, her voice thick with sleep. "Why can't Daddy come here anymore?"

Eulalie turned her back to her daughter, focusing intensely on pouring almond milk that didn't need pouring. The glass clinked against the counter, a sharp, crystalline sound.

"Some grown-up rules are in place right now, sweetie," Eulalie said. The truth tasted like sterile steel in her mouth. "To make sure everyone has their own space to think. He's working very hard on that."

"I don't think so," Elara said.

The words were soft, but they hit Eulalie with the force of a system alert. She froze. She turned around. Elara wasn't looking at her. She was looking at an iPad propped up against the sugar bowl.

"I saw Adalynn's story," Elara said, pointing a small finger at the screen. "On Instagram. They were at a bar. There was blue smoke and Daddy was laughing."

Eulalie walked over. On the screen, a fifteen-second clip played on a loop. It was a dimly lit lounge. Caden was there, his tie loosened, a drink in his hand. Adalynn was leaning into him, whispering something that made him smile—a loose, unfocused smile that Eulalie hadn't seen in years. The timestamp read "Last Night, 3:00 AM." It was a clear violation of the public decorum clause in their temporary custody agreement.

Eulalie felt a cold knot tighten in her stomach. This was ammunition. She gently took the iPad from Elara and placed it face down on the counter. She crouched so she was eye-level with her daughter.

"Elara," she said, keeping her voice steady, though her heart was hammering against her ribs. "Listen to me. No matter where he is, or what he is doing, I am here. I am always here. Do you understand?"

Elara looked at her, her eyes old and sad. She nodded, then slid off the stool. "I'm not hungry."

The drive to the Nexus office after dropping Elara at school was a blur of gray highway and white knuckles. When Eulalie stepped into the elevator, the doors were closing, but a hand shot out to stop them. It was Caden's former executive assistant, a young man named Jared who always looked like he was expecting to be fired.

"Ms. Bradford," Jared said, breathless. He held a tablet against his chest.

like a shield. "I... I have the itinerary for the weekend."

Eulalie didn't look at him. "I'm not interested in Caden's schedule, Jared."

"It's Mr. Sterling's strategic summit," Jared stammered. "The one for the newly acquired Holloway assets. Up in the Catskills. The resort is booked for the whole weekend."

Eulalie watched the floor numberstick up. "Is Caden going?"

"He's legally required to attend the Saturday morninghandover session, ma'am. As a former board member." Jared shifted his weight. "And... Ms. Pennington. She somehow got on the manifest as a 'consultant' for one of the subsidiary brands. No one knows how, but it's being seen as her last, desperate attempt to stay relevant."

Eulalie let out a short, sharp laugh. It wasn't a retreat. It was a humiliating public execution for Caden, and Adalynn was foolish enough to attend.

"Good," Eulalie said as the doors opened. "I have work to do."

"Ms. Bradford, please," Jared said, following her into the hallway. "The Elder Mrs. Holloway called. She specifically asked if you would be attending. She said... she said she needs an ally."

Eulalie stopped. Grandmother Holloway. The woman was a tyrant in pearls, but she was the only person in that family who saw Caden for the fool he was currently being. If Grandmother was asking it meant she was planning something.

"Fine," Eulalie said. "I'll be there."

When she walked into the Nexus offices, Jory was leaning against her desk, spinning a pen.

"I heard," he said. "The Catskills. The Winter Palace of corporate sin."

"I have to go," Eulalie said, dropping her bag. "Grandmother Holloway summoned me."

"You're walking into a lion's den," Jory said. He stood up. "I'm coming with you."



"Jory, no," Eulalie said. "You have the beta test to run."

"The beta can wait. My co-founder walking into a psychological war zone alone cannot." He flashed a grin that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Besides, someone has to keep you from committing homicide. It's bad for stock prices."



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