

Chapter 95 No.

The private diningroom was set for six, but only one person was seated. Grandmother Holloway sat at the head of the table, her spine as rigid as the silver candelabra. She checked her watch.

The door opened. Caden walked in. He looked haggard, his face pale and drawn under the harsh chandelier light. Adalynn trailed behind him, wearing a dress that was too short and too loud for a crisis meeting.

"Where is she?" Grandmother asked. She didn't need to say the name.

Caden pulled out a chair. "Eulalie has already left. She went back to the city with Jory and Sterling."

"Left?" Grandmother's eyes narrowed. "Without you?"

"She said his behavior was making her feel unsafe," Adalynn chimed in, pouring herself a glass of wine without asking. "After he was escorted away from the spa by security. It was all very dramatic."

"Silence," Grandmother snapped. The word was a whipcrack. She looked at Caden. "Your face. You look like a ghost. Security was involved?"

Caden looked down at his plate. "It was nothing."

"Liar," Grandmother said. She took a sip of water. "I received a text from Harrison Sterling's office. It said you were removed for 'violating the terms of a court order.' Do you know what those words mean in a divorce court, Caden?"

Caden flinched.

"And you," Grandmother pointed a gnarled finger at Adalynn. "Get out."

Adalynn froze, her glass halfway to her mouth. "Excuse me?"

"This is a family crisis meeting," Grandmother said. "You are not family. You are a symptom of my grandson's midlife crisis. You are a parasite."

Get out."

Adalynn looked at Caden, her eyes wide and wet. "Caden? Are you going to let her talk to me like that?"

Caden looked at his grandmother. He saw the iron will that had built the family name. Then he looked at Adalynn. He saw the desperation behind her smile, the frantic way she checked her phone for validation after every sentence. He realized it wasn't confidence; it was a performance on the edge of collapse.

"Go to the room, Adalynn," Caden said, his voice dull. "Order room service."

"Caden!" Adalynn shrieked.

"Go!" Caden roared, slamming his hand on the table.

Adalynn jumped. She threw her napkin down and stormed out, slamming the door so hard the crystal glasses rattled.

Grandmother didn't flinch. She cut a piece of steak. "Better. Now. Tell me the truth. Do you want a divorce?"

Caden put his head in his hands. The silence stretched for a long minute.

He thought about the empty apartment. He thought about the trading floor burning down while Adalynn worried about her Instagram lighting. Then he thought about Eulalie—standing in that pool, saving a child, commanding a room, rewriting the code of his own empire. She wasn't just a wife he had lost; she was a force he had foolishly underestimated.

He realized with a sickening jolt that he didn't just miss her warmth; he missed her competence. He missed the way she challenged him. Adalynn was a pet; Eulalie was a partner. A partner who had outgrown him.

"No," he whispered, the realization hardening into a desperate resolve. "I don't. It's not just that I miss her, Grandmother. I look at Adalynn, and I see a vacuum. I look at Eulalie, and I see... the Architect. I destroyed the only equal I ever had. I don't want to divorce her. I want to win her back."

"Who you were is dead," Grandmother said brutally. "You killed him. The question is, can you become someone she can stand to look at during settlement negotiations?"

Caden looked up. His eyes were red, but the fog of self-pity was clearing, replaced by a calculating intensity. "She hates me, Grandmother. Sterling had me thrown out like a trespasser."

"Good," Grandmother said. "Indifference is the end of a marriage. Anger? Anger is passion with nowhere to go. If she's having you legally removed, it means she still cares enough to be disappointed."

She pointed her knife at him. "Pack your bags. We are going back to the city tonight. You are going to apologize. You are going to grovel for a favorable settlement. And if you ever bring that Pennington girl into my sight again, I will write you out of the will so fast your head will spin."

Caden nodded. He stood up. He had to get home. He had to prove he wasn't just a failure. If Eulalie respected strength, he had to show her he could still fight—even if it meant fighting for her forgiveness. 