

Chapter 99 No.

The Bradford Manor was a gothicrevival monstrosity on the outskirts of the city. It had seen better centuries. The paint was peeling and the ivy was chokingthe brickwork

Eulalie parked her car. Elara ran inside to find her great-grandmother.

Eulalie found her Uncle Horton on the back porch, smoking a pipe. He looked pale.

"You're late," Horton said. "Have you seen the neighbors?"

"What neighbors?" Eulalie asked. "The estate across the street has been abandoned for twenty years."

"Not anymore," Horton pointed with his pipestem.

Eulalie walked to the edge of the porch. Across the narrow road, the wrought-iron gates of the "Old Wickham Place" were open. Construction trucks were everywhere. Scaffolding covered the facade.

But it was the sign on the lawn that stopped Eulalie's heart.

Future Home of the Pennington Family.

Eulalie grippedthe railing. "No."

"Grady and Gussie," Horton spat. "Using the last of their offshore slush fund before the Feds seize it. A final act of spite."

Gussie Pennington. The woman who had seduced Eulalie's father, helped Grady destroy his mind with false promises, and broken the Bradford family. She was going to live across the street.

"They can't," Eulalie whispered. "My grandfather... he's right upstairs. If he sees Gussie..."

"He'll snap," Horton said grimly. "The world thinks Delmar Bradford vanished into thin air ten years ago. They think he's dead or in some

< Chapter 99 No.

 +120 Points at most

Swiss clinic. But we know the truth. He's been hiding in that library, terrified of the world that betrayed him. He is fragile, Eulalie. His lucid moments are rare enough. If he sees that woman waving from her balcony—the woman who drove his daughter to an early grave and looted his legacy—it will shatter whatever mind he has left."

A black SUV pulled up across the street. The door opened. Gussie Pennington stepped out. She was wearing a bright yellow dress. She looked directly at the Bradford porch. She raised her hand and waved. A slow, mocking wave.

It wasn't a greeting. It was an invasion.

"She knows," Eulalie realized. "She knows he didn't really disappear. She knows he's hiding in there like a wounded animal. They did this on purpose. It's psychological torture."

"We need to stop the construction," Horton said. "But we don't have the political pull. They have permits."

Eulalie pulled out her phone. Her hands were steady. She didn't dial Caden. She dialed Harrison Sterling.

"Harrison," she said the moment he answered. "I need your legal team. All of them. I want to bury a property in so many injunctions and code violations it will take a century to excavate."

There was a pause on the other end. "Text me the address," Harrison said. "Consider it done."

Eulalie hung up. She looked across the street. Gussie was laughing with a contractor, pointing at the Bradford Manor as if planning which window offered the best view of their destruction.

Eulalie felt a surge of adrenaline that cleared the fear. She was not alone. She had built a better army.



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