

## Wife Mask 131

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But Hailee still seemed shaken, so Elliana pulled out her phone and sent her a message, saying, "He is Cole Evans."

The second Hailee read the text, she froze mid-step. She had never met Cole in person, but his name carried a reputation of its own. He was the billionaire leader of the Evans family. Elliana's wedding to him had made headlines everywhere. So, the two of them were husband and wife.

Hailee let out an exasperated breath and a short laugh. Seriously? A power couple picking a fight in a quiet little diner? Was this their idea of a romantic outing?

Clueless and jittery, Briggs leaned toward Hailee and asked, "Do you think we should call the police?"

With a calm smile, Hailee shook her head. "It's okay, Dad. Elliana's not in danger."

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Startled, the driver jerked the wheel before steadying it again. No one had ever dared call Cole a jerk before. What on earth was going on in the back seat?

From the passenger seat, Myles lifted one brow and said, "Eyes on the road."

With a stiff nod, the driver quickly corrected himself, gaze fixed dead ahead.

Meanwhile, Aron and Hugh looked like someone had cranked the heat-faces flushed, ears red, completely out of their depth with this kind of tension. For as long as anyone could remember, Cole had been strictly off-limits when it came to women. They had followed his lead, swearing off even casual touches like hand-holding. That was why Cole's sudden shift in behavior rattled them. He wasn't just bending the rules—he was tearing them up.

Hugh, especially, took it the hardest. He'd pegged Elliana as the desperate type, clinging to Cole ambitiously. He'd even mocked her for chasing after someone way out of reach. But now? It was

Cole chasing her—and getting called a jerk in return. What the hell was happening? He felt like his brain had short-circuited.

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Her words struck him sharply. A shadow fell over his features, his gaze turning as cold as steel.

Silence thickened in the confined limo, tension snapping in the air like static.

Right when Elliana braced herself for Cole to snap, he ended up saying something that sounded more like a complaint than an outburst instead.

"You're heartless, you know that? I was falling apart last night, and you still kicked me out. Not even a little scared I might just end up in someone else's bed?" Cole said, eyes narrowing.

Elliana didn't think he'd play victim. She rolled her eyes. "Oh please, weren't you already drooling over that whore?"

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"And what if I ultimately decide to walk away?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

"That choice is yours to make," he said simply.

The words stopped Elliana in her tracks—it wasn't the kind of sweeping line she'd seen play out in dramas. Guys in dramas would've dropped to one knee by now or thrown out some desperate plea not to leave. They'd promise the stars, the fight, the forever. But Cole? He gave her calm permission. No begging. No grand act. Maybe that meant he didn't love her as deeply as she thought. Or maybe he just wasn't the reckless, hearts-on-sleeves type. He was measured. He was proud.

She grasped real love wasn't scripted. No sweeping soundtrack, no perfectly timed tears. For someone like Cole to admit he'd chase her and build something real? That already felt like his version of a declaration. She wanted to ask for space. Just a little time to figure things out.

But Cole didn't wait. "You don't owe me anything," he said, voice low and certain. "If you need to go, go. Anywhere. Just let me be the one beside you. I'll fund the trip, do the dirty work, and raise the kids if we have any. You won't lift a finger."

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"So when exactly did you realize I wasn't ugly?" Elliana asked, raising an eyebrow.

"On our wedding night. I accidentally brushed off your veil and wig. Some of that thick makeup smeared, and I caught a glimpse of your real skin. Your face was breathtaking. The makeup had only been covering it up," Cole explained.

Cole paused and then added with quiet certainty, "From that, I could picture the real you. Gorgeous, exactly my type."

She raised an eyebrow. So, Cole had seen through her disguise all along, yet still teased her about it. That realization made her jaw clench. But when he called her his type, it hit deeper than she expected. Her glance toward him wasn't something she meant to give away.

She had no clue what that look did to him. One second later, he leaned in, lips finding hers again as he pulled her closer like he couldn't help it.

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With more force than finesse, Elliana pushed herself out of his embrace. No bluffing—she honestly needed time to get her head straight. Cole had the full package—money, looks, and the kind of charm that made her heart skip. If she took the plunge, there'd be no easing in. She'd fall fast and hard.

Agreeing to this thing with him? It felt like handing him the keys to her heart, no backup plan. That kind of surrender scared her. It was a gamble with no guarantees. She needed to be sure she could handle the emotional storm that came with someone like Cole.

The second her warmth left his arms, something in Cole tugged. Instinctively, he reached out to draw her in again.

"Stop—just don't." Just as he moved, Elliana's hand shot out, halting him in an instant.

Cole's fingers stiffened mid-air before falling away, unwilling but obedient. With frustration simmering beneath the surface, he met her gaze. "How long am I supposed to wait?" he asked, quieter than before.

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Her honesty didn't soothe him—it sparked something else entirely. Her logic made no sense to him. If something felt right, why wouldn't she just grab it and hold on? To him, it wasn't hesitation—it was leading him on without giving him any serious thought, plain and simple.

Without warning, the car door swung wide. The next thing she knew, Cole had thrown her out like he was done playing nice.

Before Elliana could even react, Cole had hurled her out of the car with startling speed.

Instinct kicked in—Elliana landed on her palms and knees, barely managing to stop herself from slamming into the ground. Still, her landing wasn't exactly graceful—she ended up crouched like a startled cat, breath short and pride bruised.

The driver and the three men outside stood frozen, their eyes darting from Elliana's crumpled form to Cole's thunderous expression inside the car. What the hell just happened? One minute, the pair were all over each other like teenagers in the back row of a movie theater, and now this? Cole had literally tossed Elliana out? Clearly, something had gone down—and by the looks of it, it wasn't pretty.

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That woman had no mercy. She reeled him in with those wide, sweet eyes—and then sliced him to pieces. She took it all—his wallet, his kisses, and his affection. To top it all off, she rode away on his four-million-dollar bike like she'd just won a heist.

After smashing the planter, Cole caught sight of his crew watching him. His gaze sharpened. "What're you looking at?"

Instantly, a cold dread crept down the crew's spines, as if a knife had been pressed to each of their necks.

Myles pushed up his glasses with deliberate caution. "Far as we're concerned, nothing happened."

"Totally blind!" the driver interjected, full panic mode activated.

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Meanwhile, Elliana had already left Regal Grove and returned alone to the Evans family's estate, her bold makeup reapplied to look as unpleasant as ever. Regardless of what had happened, she was still Cole's wife—and with that title came responsibilities. Besides, Ruben had never treated her unfairly.

It was almost midnight by the time she approached the estate. Wanting to avoid waking anyone, she parked the motorcycle far from the villa and walked the rest of the way on foot.

She expected quiet, perhaps even complete stillness, but the sight that greeted her in the living room caught her off guard.

The Evans household followed a firm rule about keeping quiet after 8 p.m., and most of them usually headed to their rooms before the clock struck 9. Therefore, it was out of the ordinary to see the whole family still gathered in the living room at such a late hour.

But tonight was different. The entire family was there. Even Ruben, who was always disciplined with his schedule, hadn't gone to bed.

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Elliana's bank account could humble half the room-and that was being generous.

Sure, the Evans name came with comfort and money, but not all of them were self-made. A good number relied on generous monthly allowance to stay afloat. And while the allowance were the kind people would kill for, beside Elliana's personal fortune, they looked laughable.

Jeff had once mocked Elliana for adopting a stray cat, claiming she couldn't even afford to feed herself. Who was laughing now?

Previously, Irene had made sly jabs about Elliana being unfit to be the Evans matriarch, while Trinity had dished out faux kindness just to feel superior.

Now the three of them—Jeff, Irene, and Trinity-sat there red -faced, swallowing every smug word they'd ever said.