

Wife Mask 241

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Elliana's heart stumbled in her chest. So this was it. He had made up his mind. Men truly were merciless. They could whisper sweet promises while chasing after someone. But the moment they gave up, their coldness could freeze the soul.

Elliana's expression didn't change, but she tightened her hold on the coin in her hand. Her mouth was pressed into a firm line as she looked at him, disappointment settling deep in her chest. She'd always been warned not to trust men. Still, she had foolishly believed the tender words Cole once spoke to her. Looking back, it was nothing short of pathetic.

With a bitter laugh inside her mind, Elliana lifted her breathtaking face and stared him down with a cold, mocking smile. "You don't deserve to hear my last words!"

In truth, she did have last words. If his bullet ended her life, all she wished for was that fate would never let her cross paths with him again in the afterlife. Because if they met once more, there was a chance she'd fall for him all over again—drawn in by that face and the sweetness of his lies, repeating every foolish mistake from this lifetime. No matter how much she hated him, she had to admit that his charm still had a grip on her.

Whatever emotion had lingered on Cole's face disappeared completely. His finger curled tighter around the trigger, as though the decision had already been made.

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Her eyes narrowed with irritation. Both hands pushed against his chest, trying to put space between them, but he stayed exactly where he was. Of course she was mad. She couldn't stand that he had used such a cruel test. She hated that he had pointed a gun at her just to prove a point. But what stung most of all was her own weakness. She had rejected him several times, claiming she didn't want him. Still, when it came down to it, she had exposed her heart without even meaning to. And there he was, wearing that smug expression like he'd won something.

"Don't be angry," Cole cooed, his voice like velvet as he kissed her Lips with a slow, burning softness.

The fire inside her hadn't gone out. The moment he kissed her, she bit down on his lip with sudden force and even ground her teeth.

A low, muffled sound escaped his throat. Yet, he didn't pull away. He let her bite him, and from the look on his face, he didn't seem to mind at all.

Eventually, Elliana stopped. The memory of the bullet still lodged in his arm flashed through her mind, and she couldn't bring herself to hurt him further.

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Cole lifted a brow, clearly surprised by the offer.

"What? Don't you trust me?" Elliana asked, catching the look he gave her.

Cole stared at her, eyes locked on with quiet intensity. "I trust you completely. You're my wife. I'm just surprised surgery's in your bag of tricks too. How many surprises are you hiding?"

Rather than answer, Elliana moved in and began to undo his shirt.

"Honey, are you planning to have sex with me after stripping off my shirt?" Cole asked, leaning in with a grin. His voice was playful, full of teasing intent.

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"I'm good without it," Cole said, stone-cold serious. "I can handle it."

He had always hated the numbness that came with anesthesia. He would rather feel pain than feel numb.

Seeing his firm resolve, Elliana sighed. "Fine. But don't start complaining halfway through."

Without wasting time, Elliana started.

Her hand moved steadily as she cut through the skin, zeroed in on the bullet buried in muscle, and pulled it out without a hitch. Right after that, she stitched the wound, cleaned it thoroughly, and wrapped it tight.

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Cole lay back in silence, watching her every movement like she was something rare and exquisite. He'd seen her fierce. He'd seen her cold. But this version—quiet, gentle, attentive—made his heart stir.

Elliana tried to ignore the weight of his stare and, once finished, turned to take the basin away.

That was when his hand suddenly shot out and caught hers.

She turned back toward him. "What is it now?"

"Is that it?" Cole asked with a pout that didn't suit a man of his stature.

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"Don't move," he whispered, his voice low and soothing as it rumbled against her ear. "Just stay like this. For a moment."

Elliana refused to remain motionless merely because Cole commanded her stillness. The two of them shared a single blanket, their closeness electrified with unspoken tension. Considering Cole's typically tactile nature, she anticipated the inevitable eruption of chemistry between them. When he instructed her not to move, she deliberately shifted even more.

"You must release me. Your injury has left you vulnerable and weakened. You require proper rest rather than entertaining frivolous thoughts, or you'll exacerbate your condition!" she earnestly advised him.

Nevertheless, Cole exhibited no willingness to let her go. Each time she stirred, he would exclaim dramatically, "Ah, the agony! It's intolerable! My breathing falters, and my heart feels as if it's ceasing to beat!"

Upon hearing his theatrical Lamentations, Elliana genuinely hesitated to move further. She tilted her head to scrutinize his expression, attempting to discern the authenticity beneath his performative distress.

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He concluded emphatically, "Therefore, our intervention remains premature."

Following this analysis, Myles, Aron, and Hugh lapsed into contemplative silence.

Allan and Merlin shifted uncomfortably. Despite their status as heirs to prestigious families and rumors of their prolific romantic conquests, reality marked them as relative novices in matters of intimacy. Before Manley's seasoned perspective, they experienced profound embarrassment.

Observing the discomfort on Allan's and Merlin's expressions, Manley swelled with unprecedented pride. Among the four companions, he—the youngest—often perceived his character and wisdom as inferior. Today, however, he radiated the authority of a natural leader, a sensation he found exhilarating.

Within the room, neither Elliana nor Cole suspected the eavesdropping ensemble outside.

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While she tried to make sense of it, Cole's voice dropped, his tone thick with desire. "You told me not to touch you or think anything inappropriate. Then you go and show me your pretty face. Are you trying to test my self-control?"

That made her flush even harder, heat rushing to her ears. As soon as she noticed the hunger in his gaze, she jumped off his lap and quickly created some space between them. She hadn't expected that trying to make him happy would land her in a tricky situation.

"I-I'm thirsty. I need some water," she stammered, grabbing at the excuse like a lifeline to get away from the bed.

But she didn't get the chance to take even one step before he pulled her right back.

This time, his arms locked around her tightly, holding her so close that she ended up sprawled across his body, completely stuck.

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Cole's instincts kicked in fast. He turned toward the door while pulling the blanket up to cover Elliana, shielding her from whoever had barged in.

Myles, Aron, and Hugh were the first ones to storm through the door, with Allan, Merlin, and Manley right behind them.

Their faces were drawn tight with concern, but the second their eyes landed on the scene in front of them, they stopped cold.

From outside, they had been keeping a close eye on things, anxious that Elliana might do something to harm Cole. When the loud crash echoed through the room, Hugh couldn't stay put any longer—

he kicked the door open and charged inside. The rest had followed him without hesitation. But now, standing there, none of them knew what to say.

The blanket covered Cole from the waist down, while his bare chest was completely visible. His lips looked kissed raw, and his gaze burned with something fierce. Beside him, fully wrapped in the blanket, was a slender figure pressed tightly against him.

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"Honey, is it really that funny?" Cole asked, clearly annoyed.

Elliana could tell Cole was overwhelmed by frustration, and though she knew better than to laugh, it just bubbled up and burst out of her anyway. Try as she might, she couldn't stop herself. She ended up laughing far longer than was decent.

Cole didn't say a word. He simply watched her with a gaze that was half affectionate, half exasperated. When her laughter finally subsided, he released a gentle chuckle, tapped her forehead playfully with his fingertip, and murmured tenderly, "You naughty thing."