

Wife Mask 271

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Elliana shot him a sharp glance and then turned away with a haughty flick of her chin. "I don't feel like explaining."

Cole reached out and gently pinched her cheek, a playful gesture full of fondness. He didn't press her any further. She remained an enigma to him, and he was in no rush to unravel her secrets. He'd get there—little by little.

At that moment, a knock echoed at the door.

Once they gave the go-ahead, Paulina stepped inside. "Mr. Evans, Mrs. Evans, dinner is ready."

Paulina had always been Cole's trusted housekeeper. During Elliana's stay at the Evans estate, she had been the one to look after Elliana. Now that Elliana lived with Cole in Regal Grove, Paulina had moved in with them as well.

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Just in case Paulina didn't catch on, Myles added gently, "Elliana."

Paulina froze in place, the shock landing like a blow. Her eyes darted back to Elliana, now wide with disbelief.

Elliana let out a soft laugh. "Sorry about that, Paulina. I didn't put on any makeup after showering. Didn't mean to catch you off guard."

Paulina's lips twitched, unsure of how to respond. The transformation was stunning. Who could've guessed that the woman everyone had once written off was hiding a face more captivating than any celebrity on a screen? No wonder Cole was completely spellbound. It finally all made sense.

Trying to recover, Paulina quickly stepped forward and pulled out a chair. "Mrs. Evans, please—come sit."

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The taste of steak and peppery sauce lingered on his lips, unexpectedly invading her senses. The sensation left her momentarily breathless. She swallowed thoughtfully. Was this the flavor of love?

Observing her dazed expression, Cole's heart surged with affection. Unable to resist, he showered her with several swift, gentle kisses before leaning close to whisper, "I possess the potential to be an exemplary husband."

With that, he selected a morsel of fish, meticulously removed every bone, and offered the piece to her.

Elliana parted her lips, accepting his offering.

Cole's smile deepened as his gaze caressed her face. "Honey, we've already mastered the art of being the perfect wife and husband. When might we begin practicing for parenthood?"

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After navigating several digital barriers, she finally breached Jody's sophisticated firewall. Just as she prepared to delve deeper into protected files, Jody's familiar digital presence emerged.

Jody's firewall wasn't just good—it was elite. The kind of system that could frustrate even the most seasoned hackers.

Even Elliana had to admit it was a challenge. She'd been working on it for quite some time. And the whole time she was cracking away at the system, Jody never showed. That only boosted her confidence. Maybe her hunch was right—maybe Myles really was Jody. She had made Myles unconscious, which might suggest the Evans Group's most important gatekeeper was basically disarmed.

But just as she reached the final layer, ready to access the Evans Group's database, Jody appeared out of nowhere.

Though they couldn't see each other, Elliana felt like she'd been caught in the act. Her heart stuttered. It was the exact feeling of a burglar getting caught mid-heist.

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Elliana's voice remained steady. "Is his surgery urgent?"

Hailee hesitated. Then, almost in a whisper, she replied, "Yes. The doctor said I have to come up with the surgery money in the next couple of days. My boyfriend doesn't have much time left... His condition worsened."

Elliana's gaze flicked to an invitation card lying on the table. Her expression shifted as an idea slowly took shape. "Hailee," she said thoughtfully, "come with me to a banquet tonight. I'll bring the money and hand it to you there."

Though confused by the unexpected request, Hailee didn't question it. She trusted Elliana. "Okay, I'll be there."

After ending the call, Elliana opened the invitation and read the golden embossed text carefully.

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Silence settled over the room like a heavy blanket. "So, what are you planning to do next?" Cole asked quietly.

Elliana didn't hold back. "I usually mind only my own business, but Boris is playing my friend. I'm not about to just let that slide. He needs to be held accountable."

Cole gave a calm nod. "Then handle it your way."

Elliana raised one brow. "You're seriously not going to try to stop me?"

Cole met her eyes without flinching. "Why would I stop you? You're doing what's right."

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Elliana's face turned bright red. Cole had thrown that line at her so many times lately, always muttering about how she left him hanging, stuck in that frustrating in-between. She gently pressed a hand to his chest. "Darling?"

"Stay still!" Cole blurted out, his voice strained and gravelly. "If you move even a little more, I don't know if I'll be able to hold myself back."

Elliana froze on the spot, hands tucked neatly against her sides, not daring to breathe wrong. When it finally felt safe to speak, she tried again, her voice cautious as she said, "I've got something important to talk to you about..."

"I don't want to hear it!" Cole muttered, his voice darkening with each syllable.

Elliana gazed resignedly at the ceiling, frustration etching lines across her forehead. Ever since they'd started going steady, completing a simple conversation with Cole felt like scaling a treacherous mountain face.

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Elliana shook her head, concern etching her features. "Your injuries haven't fully mended. I couldn't bear watching you strain yourself. Just chill at home and wait for me."

Honestly, the real reason was that Cole's presence at the party would shatter her carefully orchestrated strategy. As the Evans family's head, he would be expected to step forward and intervene should any complications arise. The responsibility to clean up would fall squarely on his shoulders—a burden she refused to allow him to carry. She needed him safely distanced from tonight's events.

"Then you go." He conceded, completely disarmed by her concern. "Just return to me quickly."

Elliana sprang from the bed, energy pulsing through her limbs. "Deal! I will be back before you know it!"

A thought crystallized in her mind, pulling her back. She leaned down, capturing his mouth in a lingering, deliberate kiss. "Coley, every moment away will feel incomplete without you. Promise you'll miss me just as fiercely."

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Once everything was ready, Cole and Elliana got into the car and headed for the Evans family estate.

As they stepped into the opulent living room, it was immediately clear—every member of the family had been summoned.

Trinity had just returned from her trip overseas with Murray, supposedly to meet the renowned Milena. She was holding court in the corner, chatting nonstop and glowing like she'd just walked off a red carpet.

Jason, still wearing his black half mask, sprawled across the sofa, his calm yet dominant presence instantly silencing the younger crowd nearby.

Irene sat proudly beside him, radiating smug satisfaction, acting like her son's return had bumped her up the social ladder.

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Irene had been laying low lately, licking her wounds, but now that Jason was back, she slipped right back into her past antics. "Elliana, there are some things you need to learn, and you'd better pay attention."

Elliana lifted an eyebrow and gave a lazy half-smile. "Go ahead, I'm listening."

With her chin lifted high, Irene sent a sideways glance in Elliana's direction. "You're the matriarch of the Evans family now. That role comes with power, but also with Limits. You can't just do whatever you want or you'll end up creating trouble."

Elliana's mouth twitched, more amused than annoyed. "And what kind of trouble do you mean?"