

## Wife Mask 281

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Trinity, in particular, looked delighted. Her eyes sparkled with the kind of joy only someone who enjoyed seeing others fall could wear.

"What kind of twisted nonsense is that, Irene?" Cole finally snapped, his tone sharp and frosty, slicing through the tension in the room.

Until now, Cole had kept quiet out of respect. Irene was still Jason's mother, still one of the elders. But her rant had gone too far. She wasn't speaking from concern anymore. She was piling blame on Elliana, and he wasn't going to stand there and let it happen.

Irene had been gearing up for more when Cole's voice shut her down on the spot. She hadn't seen it coming. She figured with Ruben staying silent, she had full license to unload on Elliana. She didn't expect Cole to be the one to stop her cold.

"Cole, I'm only doing this for the good of the family," Irene retorted, scrambling to reframe her rant.

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Silence descended, absolute and oppressive. Everyone sat ramrod straight, not daring to disturb the stillness.

Trinity, who had earlier radiated smugness about her visit to the so-called Milena and her hopes of outshining Elliana, now kept her head bowed, utterly silent.

The room's previous energy evaporated beneath Cole's frigid tirade, the atmosphere plummeting to subzero temperatures.

Through the whole showdown with Irene, Ruben stayed mum.

Cole now held the position of Evans patriarch, and when he disciplined a family member, Ruben refused to interfere, showing his respect for Cole's ruling.

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They pictured the kind of wise old figure one would see in a movie—calm, grey-haired, maybe even saintly.

"Now I really want to meet him."

"Who wouldn't?"

"Too bad we're not Trinity. No way he'd show up for us." "She's so Lucky."

Trinity soaked it in—the admiration, the envy. Her pride swelled. This was her moment in the spotlight. After all, she'd done what even Cole couldn't—she met the great Dr. Atkinson and brought him to their door.

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Cole turned to Trinity, voice even and cool. "Did Dr. Atkinson mention when he's coming to treat Barbara?"

Trinity lit up, her smile flirty and full of sparkle. "He said he'll drop by Ublento soon. He plans to talk with Professor Sampson and check on Barbara while he's here."

"How soon is soon?" Ruben asked, worry creeping into his voice. He knew the Venacure pill Elliana had coughed up wouldn't hold Barbara for long. If Dr. Atkinson delayed, Barbara might land back in the ICU. He needed answers—fast.

Trinity replied, "It won't be long. I gave him all of Barbara's records. He said the timing's under control. Barbara will be fine until he arrives. You can breathe easy."

Ruben finally let out a breath he'd been holding.

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"Milena said that after decades of practicing medicine and traveling to the farthest corners of the world, he never met anyone worthy of inheriting his legacy. But then he met me. He said I had something rare in me. Talent, intuition—something that couldn't be ignored. That's why he chose me to carry on everything he knows." Trinity lifted her chin just a little and straightened her posture as she spoke, carrying herself with a quiet, unmistakable pride.

Elliana didn't return the praise with admiration. Instead, she offered Trinity a faint smile, one tinged with dry amusement.

That reaction unsettled Trinity more than she let on. Still, she kept her tone bright with pride as she said, "Milena told me I might be the only protégé he ever chooses. That's why he treasures this so deeply and is willing to come all the way to Ublento just for the mentorship ceremony."

Lance looked thoroughly convinced, his face lighting up with admiration. "Trinity, that's incredible! Milena must have crossed paths with countless brilliant minds over the years, and for him to pick you? That says everything. Your talent must be unmatched!"

Trinity gave him a bashful smile. "Lance, you're making me blush. I wouldn't go so far as to call myself talented. Milena probably just saw how committed I am and how I push through every challenge. Maybe that's what made him choose me."

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With no other choice, Elliana leaned over and gave his side a quick pinch, snapping him back to the moment. Once again, they were stealing the spotlight.

Cole jerked slightly at the sting, his brow twitching, but he brushed it off smoothly. His attention shifted to Trinity as he said, "Yeah? What is it?" His tone was cold as ever.

Trinity forced her features into stillness, doing her best to mask the storm raging beneath the surface. Frustration and hurt churned just beneath her smile. She had come here hoping to dazzle Cole with her success and knock Elliana down a few notches in the process. But Elliana hadn't batted an eye, and Cole hadn't changed—not even a little. Where did things go wrong? Why didn't anything she said shake Elliana or impress Cole?

Though Trinity's chest felt ready to burst, she kept her tone light. "Cole, I'll convince Dr. Atkinson to allow everyone in the Evans family to attend the mentorship ceremony. You and Elliana can finally see for yourselves how incredible he is."

Trinity was determined to make sure Cole saw her shining at center stage, all while Elliana slowly slipped out of the spotlight.

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Even from a distance, Jeff's small frame seemed to carry the weight of heartache. The same kid who used to be a walking menace now looked like a pitiful, bald cartoon with his feelings hurt.

Elliana shot Cole an exasperated look. "Did you really have to be that harsh with a kid?"

Cole let out a dry snort. "Kid? That so-called kid's already plotting to swipe his cousin's wife ten years from now. That little troublemaker's got ambition and a playbook to match!"

Elliana's lips twitched, but she didn't bother replying.

Instead, she climbed into the car without a word. There was no point arguing when Cole was on a roll. Plus, she couldn't care less about his rant about Jeff.

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That was when she pulled back abruptly. "Hey! Don't move," she said sharply, eyes narrowed in mock annoyance.

Cole blinked, slightly breathless, leaning back into the seat with his hands raised in surrender. His gaze stayed locked on her flushed cheeks and pouty lips.

"I'm the one saying thank you," she remarked, her voice full of attitude. "So why are you kissing me back?"

He laughed, low and amused. "Alright, alright. I'll behave," he said, smiling at her with playful affection. "Go on. I'm all yours."

Elliana beamed at his obedient stillness. Cradling his face in her hands, she leaned forward and kissed him again.

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The driver blinked, unsure if he'd heard correctly, and threw a confused glance toward Myles sitting up front.

Myles stared for half a second before jolting upright and signaling the driver to pull over.

Without missing a beat, the driver eased the car toward the side of the road.

A few moments later, the vehicle rolled to a gentle stop.

Myles leaned toward the back and asked through the partition, "Mr. Evans, is everything alright?"

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Elliana's hand reached for the door, but before she could open it, Cole tugged her back in.

Without warning, he lifted her onto his lap, narrowing his eyes in mock irritation. "You were really just gonna leave like that?"

Elliana caught on right away and leaned forward, planting a quick kiss on his lips. So that was what he was after—a proper goodbye.

But just as she began to pull away, Cole deepened the kiss, pressing in with force. When he finally let up, his voice dropped low. "Call me if anything comes up."

"Okay," Elliana whispered, voice soft and a\_ little breathless.