

Wife Mask 341

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Elliana pouted and said nothing.

Cole went on, his tone sharp. "You told me you were serious about this marriage. That you'd never lie to your husband. And now look at you."

Elliana rubbed her nose, unease all over her face.

Cole's anger boiled over. "You make those sweet promises, then turn around and break every single one. Do I even matter to you?"

He pointed at the bed. "Get on your stomach."

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Cole wasn't giving up. He kept whispering sweet apologies, and when she least expected it, he popped a mango candy into her mouth. She tried to resist but the taste got her. A small smile crept onto her Lips.

Cole let out a long breath. Thank God. One emotional rant from Elliana, and he was toast. She could be warm and affectionate when she wanted—but when she got fired up, she was fire and fury. And strangely enough, he kind of loved that about her. Even after her rant, he felt amazing, like he was on cloud nine. Newlyweds, right? They fought like thunder and made up like sunshine. A few minutes later, they were back to snuggling, sharing quiet kisses and smiles.

By the time work hours rolled in, Cole settled at his computer, focused on emails and reports. Elliana lay sprawled on the sofa, casually scrolling through her phone. After a few minutes, she looked up and said, "I'm thinking of paying a little visit to the AI Research and Development Department."

"What for?" Cole asked, glancing up from his screen.

Elliana didn't skip a beat. "That jerk Lance keeps giving me the stink eye. I'm going to put him in his place."

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Still bewildered, Wesley departed the CEO's office, unable to decipher why Cole dismissed Elliana's words so casually and hadn't reprimanded him.

After Wesley's departure, Cole sank into contemplation. Elliana had never encountered Wesley before, yet today she'd deliberately sought Wesley out, even offering matchmaking services. He wasn't naive enough to believe she'd done this out of mere boredom. She'd obviously grasped at random conversation topics to conceal her true intentions—drugging Wesley. But what drove Elliana to drug him?

After a moment's reflection, Cole's lips curved into a meaningful smile.

Meanwhile, Elliana remained oblivious that Wesley had visited the CEO's office to apologize, unwittingly exposing her use of drugs to Cole. She sauntered confidently into the AI Research and Development Department.

The Evans Group had ventured into artificial intelligence research during Jarrett's leadership, a field they'd pursued for over a decade without significant breakthroughs.

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So, Elliana planted herself there in complete silence, observing every desperate gesture for thirty uninterrupted minutes. Not one soul registered her presence.

At the room's epicenter, Lance teetered on the edge of complete breakdown, his mind grasping for solutions that remained maddeningly out of reach.

Emmanuel's voice suddenly thundered across the space as he swept in with several senior executives trailing behind him. "What chaos is this?"

Every head swiveled toward the entrance. That was when Lance's gaze finally landed on Elliana's still figure. His expression transformed into something dark and menacing. "Elliana, who granted you permission into this place?"

Elliana met his glare with casual indifference. "Didn't I mention over lunch that I'd swing by this afternoon? What's got you so worked up?"

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The rest of the team felt lightning strike their consciousness. That name electrified every nerve ending in the room, sending shockwaves through their collective despair.

"Alonso stands among the most blazing stars in AI development circles right now. He's woven his genius through countless major projects across the industry. Perhaps he truly possesses the power to illuminate a path through our darkness!"

"I've caught whispers that Alonso's fees reach legendary heights, though."

Emmanuel's eyes lit up with a rare glimmer of hope. "Lance, if even the thinnest thread of possibility exists that he can rescue us from this abyss, pay whatever he demands. Just bring him into our world."

Lance acknowledged with a sharp nod and drew his phone from his pocket, fingers already dancing toward Alonso's contact information.

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Lance picked up fast. "Hello, Alonso!" Alonso's calm voice came through. "Lance, what's going on?"

Lance quickly explained the situation. "Alonso, do you have time to help me out?"

To his surprise, Alonso agreed easily. "Actually, I'm near the Evans Group building right now. I'll drop by and take a look."

Lance nearly burst with joy. "Thank you so much, Alonso! I'll come down to meet you right away!"

Lance ended the call and rushed out, barely hiding his excitement.

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Roughly an hour slipped by before Alonso finally broke the silence with a weary sigh. "I really want to help, but I can't fix this."

"What?" Faces froze as they took in Alonso, disbelief written across every brow. When even Alonso failed to fix it, there was no saving this project.

Emmanuel's features tightened, defeat carving fresh lines across his face.

Lance forced a lopsided grin, trying to inject some hope into the tension. "Alonso, you don't have to rush to a conclusion. It's only been an hour. If you keep at it, maybe something will come to you."

But Alonso's answer was firm, his voice steady and unyielding. "This isn't a problem that can be solved with time. The real issue is buried in the very framework. If it was something superficial, maybe we could slap on a fix. But when the core is flawed, there's nothing to be done."

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With an icy look, she retorted, "You're busy wrangling your own team. I'm merely keeping to myself. Unless you're planning to start a fight, we're not interfering with each other, are we?"

Lance's anger toward Elliana simmered beneath the surface, yet he felt powerless to act. Finally, with a sneer curling his lips, he shot at her, "Elliana, you just want to watch me fail, don't you? Well, I'll prove you wrong. The Seek project will be a triumph, and when I rise to legendary status in the AI community, you won't even be worthy of glancing my way."

Elliana continued to toy with her fingers, amusement flickering in her laughter. "Even if you fix all the issues and the Seek project succeeds, turning you into a legendary figure in the field, you still won't earn my respect."

Arguing with Elliana seemed to fuel Lance's frustration, yet it also provided a strange release. His energy intensified as he pulled up a chair and sat beside her, eyes narrowing with disdain. "Elliana, what makes you so arrogant?"

Elliana glanced at Lance as if he were a simpleton, her fingers never ceasing their subtle movements. Her voice remained casual, laced with indifferent confidence. "My abilities, naturally."

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Dillen's comment sent a ripple through the room.

Lance's expression faltered for a brief second. There was no way Elliana could've met someone like Dillen. Dillen was a top-secret national asset, a government-trained AI expert whose background was so tightly guarded that even seasoned researchers only heard whispers of his existence. Most people in the field had never heard of him. And Elliana? She hardly knew a thing about AI development and definitely couldn't have met Dillen.

Regaining composure, Lance smiled and said dismissively, "Mr. Perez, you must be mistaken. There's no way she's ever met you."

But Dillen didn't buy it. He kept his eyes on Elliana, his brows drawn together thoughtfully. "There's something familiar about her. She reminds me of a master I admire deeply. The sharpness in her eyes, that sense of clarity.. It's uncanny."

Lance almost snorted. Sharpness in Elliana's eyes? He thought her expression was as plain as her looks—nothing particularly "uncanny" about her, at least not in any flattering way. But he kept that opinion to himself, especially with Dillen present.

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But unlike her, Emmanuel looked up, his eyes flickering with a renewed spark. "Mr. Perez, may I ask who your mentor is?"

Dillen answered without hesitation, "Hutton Tucker. He once led teams at the National AI Research Institute and is widely considered one of the sharpest minds in the field today. His skills far surpass mine. If anyone can salvage this project, it's him."

He paused and then added, "And there's one more important thing-Mr. Tucker was once a protégé of River."

"River?" Lance repeated, his eyes lighting up. "Do you mean River, whose theories shaped modern artificial intelligence? The legend in the AI community?"

Dillen smiled and nodded. "Yes. That River."