

## Wife Mask 391

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She crossed her arms, her eyebrow raised. "Just say whatever you came here to say."

He rubbed the back of his neck, an awkward grin flickering across his face. "So, would you consider, I don't know, maybe taking me on as your apprentice? I'd really like to learn AI tech from River."

Elliana wasn't surprised. She'd seen this coming for weeks. Still, she'd never brought it up, waiting to see if he'd ever ask outright. Now, seeing him finally work up the nerve, she didn't even blink before shutting him down. "No."

Lance stiffened, stunned. "Why?"

Elliana fired back, her words sharp as broken glass. "You think you're anywhere near Hutton's level? Don't kid yourself." She didn't bother softening the blow. "It's already more work for me because Hutton is my apprentice. If I had to take you on—someone not even close to his ILeague—I'd never have a moment's peace."

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Startled, Lance and Jeff scrambled into the bushes, tripping over each other in their hurry.

The scene nearly sent Elliana into a fit of laughter.

Cole soon reached Elliana, casting a glance at Ruben, who was sprawled out and snoring atop a large stone slab. Turning to Elliana, he inquired, "Why come to a place like this to watch the moon?"

Elliana, crouched beside Ruben, propped her chin on her hands and replied, "Your grandpa wouldn't take no for an answer. He claims it's the only place left without interruptions."

Cole knew Ruben had been regressing into childish habits lately, so he let it go. Leaning down, he gently shook Ruben's shoulder. "Come on, Grandpa, let's get you back inside. It's cold—you'll catch something if you stay out here."

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"Alright," Elliana replied. "Keep me in the loop."

After ending the call, Elliana dressed herself up and headed out. She wanted to check on what Jason was up to. She had already deduced that Jason was Sombra from Moonveil.

Therefore, knowing his next move was the key to outmaneuvering Moonveil. Right now, only a senior instructor from Moonveil had stepped out to intervene in the situation, and as Star Society's second-in-command, Matthew could manage the fallout. But if Jason made a move, she'd have to act before things spun out of control.

Once out of her room, Elliana nearly collided with Paulina, who had been waiting by the door.

"Mr. Evans had urgent matters and left for the office early. He asked me to stay behind to assist you if you needed anything," Paulina explained with a respectful smile.

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She had sacrificed her youth to the Evans family, borne Bertram two sons—one of them the very man now confronting her. She had poured everything she had into this household. Yet, the one thing she craved most, Bertram's love, had always been out of reach. It remained her most bitter failure—the wound that never healed.

Jason didn't stop. "It's because you dreamed too big. Dad hated the weight of your ambition. That's why, no matter how much you gave up for him, he never loved you."

Irene said nothing. Because he was right. She had always wanted more.

Years back, after Cole's mother abruptly vanished, Irene had stepped into the vacuum, running the Evans estate with ruthless precision as the acting matriarch. But just being the acting matriarch wasn't enough for her. Watching Jarrett sink into despair over his missing wife, she'd pushed Bertram again and again to seize the reins of the Evans family, to overthrow the broken Jarrett and become the family's patriarch. She wanted to stand beside a man who ruled.

But Bertram had never bitten. He lived for antiques, not dynasties. Every time she brought up power, he'd shut her out—emotionally, physically—sometimes banishing her to sleep alone for weeks.

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Jason didn't linger. His mind was already pulling toward another storm—the simmering tension between Star Society and Moonveil. Without another word, he left.

Downstairs, the sun filtered through the trees, casting dappled light across the lawn. There, beneath a canopy of green, sat Elliana-alone, quietly admiring the bloom of late -spring flowers.

Jason approached her, his voice low but direct. "Elliana, there's something we need to talk about..."

Elliana awakened this morning to discover the dining room shrouded in silence, completely deserted. She hastily crafted a sandwich, filled a glass with milk, and then carried her makeshift breakfast outside to a towering oak at the villa's perimeter.

Though the spot appeared idyllic for a peaceful meal, Elliana had selected it with calculated precision. The tree commanded a perfect view of the main drive, revealing every soul who entered or departed-particularly Jason.

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Forceful methods? Now he had descended to. outright intimidation. She regarded him with sideways glances, sarcasm glittering in her expression. "Since when do you dictate Cole's love life? Last time I verified, your responsibilities involved protecting the family, not monitoring his matrimonial choices."

"Cole stands as the Evans family head. His wife becomes our family's public representative. Therefore, his marriage transcends personal preference-it constitutes a clan necessity. As someone who occupies a crucial position within the Evans structure, I possess absolute authority to intervene," Jason proclaimed, as though reciting fundamental law.

"Fair enough." Elliana acknowledged with a casual shrug. Then, a wicked smile bloomed across her features. "But Cole adores me. I have no desire to leave him and intend to cling to him with desperate determination. I will continue to be his wife despite your disapproval. What power does your objection truly wield?"

"Don't you dare!" Jason's legendary self-control finally shattered. Given the extraordinary demands of his position, he had spent years forging his emotions into steel, training himself to respond with calculated calm to any provocation. Rare individuals possessed the skill to pierce his armor. Yet Elliana, with nothing more than a handful of carefully chosen words, had succeeded in demolishing his composure.

Elliana relished watching him battle to contain his blazing rage, her bold provocations flowing like honey from her lips. "Please, demonstrate these 'forceful methods' you mentioned!"

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"Lance, do you dislike me already and will never like me again?" Her voice cracked.

He sighed. "I don't dislike you. Yes, you made a mistake. But Grandpa was right—nobody's perfect. As long as you learn from it, the Evans family—and I—will still care about you."

"Thank you, Lance." Trinity looked up at him, her eyes shining. "But I'm so worried.."

"About what?" he asked gently.

She bit her lip. "The truth is, I didn't mean what I said about Hailee. I just panicked when I watched her tear my family apart. Plus, Elliana pushed her to cause that scene at the party. I never would've acted like that if not for Elliana."

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Compared to Irene, Louisa's personality stood out as quite different. Irene never hid how she felt, greeting those she cared for with real warmth and turning cold toward people she disliked. Louisa, on the other hand, preferred to keep a smile for everyone, never letting her real thoughts slip through. She avoided getting tangled in small matters and managed not to offend anyone, but there was a careful calculation behind her actions.

Living with the Evans family for years, Trinity had become skilled at reading the smallest cues in people, especially Louisa. There was a time when Louisa had encouraged Lance to pursue her, but after what happened last night, Louisa seemed to have changed her stance.

The realization left Trinity feeling even more troubled. Even though she never pictured a future with Lance, she could not shake off the sting of being cast out of their options.

Without knowing what was on Trinity's mind, Lance reached his car. Just as he went to open the door, he realized Louisa had come after him. "Mom, did you want something?" he asked.

Facing her son, Louisa dropped her smile. With a firm expression, she said, "I want you to keep your distance from Trinity from now on. I do not support the two of you together."

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Fuming, the instructor on the Moonveil side—a man notorious for his hair-trigger temper—stormed to Crossvista Mountain, dragging a crew of indignant students behind him. He hadn't even bothered to seek approval from his superiors. This was now a matter of pride, and he wanted payback.

Typically, if the opposing side sent only a \_ mid-tier instructor, the Star Society would respond in kind, matching rank for rank. But today, under Elliana's direct orders, Matthew himself took charge.

As Matthew strode onto Crossvista Mountain, he found Moonveil's instructor raging at the gates, demanding the Star Society surrender the students involved in last night's brawl so Moonveil could take their revenge.

Matthew didn't bother with pleasantries. He shut down the instructor's demands with a steely glare and a forceful kick. "I'm Matthew Santos, second-in-command of the Star Society," he declared, his voice echoing off the courtyard walls. "If Moonveil wants answers, then tell Sombra to come himself!"

The instructor was no match for Matthew and left pale and breathless. He wasted no time rushing back to report this standoff to his superiors.

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Fixing Matthew with a steely stare, Jason spoke with icy resolve. "Apologies on behalf of my subordinates, Mr. Santos. However, you appear overly confident as you specifically requested my presence. How about I unravel Star Society's esteemed reputation as a gesture?"

The unspoken threat hung thickly between them. To forgo pleasantries and declare an intention to dismantle the Star Society was tantamount to a declaration of war.

Matthew met Jason's gaze, eyes narrowing slightly. But he didn't respond. He recognized he was no match for Jason and dared not escalate the confrontation further. All their hopes now rested on Elliana's timely arrival.

Jason cracked his knuckles deliberately. "So tell me, Mr. Santos—do you plan on fighting me yourself? Or should we drag Lexi into this?"

Before Matthew could utter a reply, a brazen car horn shattered the mountain's stillness. All eyes snapped toward the winding road where a sleek black SUV thundered down at a reckless pace.