

## **Beneath His Ugly Wife's Mask: Her Revenge Was Her Brilliance**

### **Chapter: 51**

Matthew stared at the check, tempted. It was an easy job. Too easy. Normally, he would've taken it on the spot. Elliana seldom asked about the Star Society's matters, and he made all the calls. But this time, he couldn't decide since Elliana was involved. Cole was oblivious that the person he searched for was sitting right beside him. It was hilarious, really. Who needed such a large amount of money to deliver a message between husband and wife?

Matthew's expression grew strange. Cole noticed and frowned. "Mr. Santos, please speak freely."

Matthew found it amusing internally but maintained a composed exterior. "Mr. Evans, I'll need to check with Lexi first."

To show respect, Matthew continued explaining. "Mr. Evans, you must understand- Milena's whereabouts are an incredibly guarded secret. Powerful people from all corners of the world are after Milena. If the Star Society were to take this on, it would require Lexi's direct involvement. And for that reason, I can't give you a definite answer just yet."

Cole gave a small nod. "Then, can you arrange for me to meet Lexi?"

Matthew held back a laugh. "I'm afraid that won't be easy. Lexi doesn't meet with outsiders."

"Then, please pass along a message for me. If Lexi is open to meeting, I'd be glad to get acquainted."

"Understood. I'll deliver your message." Outwardly, Matthew nodded in agreement. Inwardly, he was amused. Cole wanted him to deliver a message to Lexi? But Lexi was actually Elliana, Cole's wife. Still, since Elliana had no intention of revealing her discreet identities as Lexi and Milena yet, he wouldn't tell Cole the truth.

Oblivious to Matthew's thoughts, Cole thanked him with a polite smile. "I appreciate it, Mr. Santos. I'll take my leave."

With that, Cole took Elliana's hand and led her out of the room.

Once outside the room, Elliana glanced at Cole curiously. "Do you really want to be friends with Lexi?"

"I do."

"Why? You don't strike me as someone who enjoys making friends."

"I don't know. I just have this feeling that Lexi's a good person."

"You feel some kind of instinctual bond?" "Maybe. Either way, I like how the Star Society operates."

Elliana burst into laughter. "Well, next time you go out, leave your eyes at home. Your instincts seem to do all the work."

Elliana was genuinely amused. Cole picked women based on feelings, now friends too? Were his eyes just decoration?

Cole chuckled and gently pinched her cheek. "You're getting bold."

By evening, they returned to the Evans estate.

Three days had passed, and Irene and Jeff had been released from confinement. Now they sat quietly on the living room sofa.

Irene wore a bitter expression, her pride clearly bruised. When she saw Elliana walk in, she shot Elliana a quick glare and then looked away in silence.

Jeff, who once acted with arrogance, looked completely deflated. When he saw Cole, he jumped up immediately. "Cole! You're finally back! Did you find Milena?"

Ruben and Bertram, seated nearby, paused their discussion to look over, clearly concerned.

Cole pressed his lips into a straight line. "No."

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The light in Jeff's eyes faded, and he dropped back onto the sofa. "I'm finished. It's over.."

Bertram let out a heavy sigh. "Miss Henderson fell into a coma today. It took ages to revive her. Her mother stormed in, furious. She said if her daughter dies, Jeff must follow her to the grave."

Offended, Irene snapped, "That was too much! Jeff didn't hurt Miss Henderson on purpose! Plus, we've compensated the Henderson family and hired the best doctors.. What more do they want? Miss Henderson is just unlucky. It's been two years—they're still making trouble. They're clearly trying to squeeze more money out of us!"

Bertram turned sharply to Irene. "Watch your words. Regardless of their motives, if Miss Henderson dies, the consequences fall on Jeff. Even if he avoids jail, he'll carry that stigma for life."

Irene dropped her head, looking shaken. "So what now?"

Ruben cast a disappointed look at Bertram and Irene before facing Cole. "Ultimately, our family is at fault. If Miss Henderson dies, I won't be able to live with it. No matter the cost, we have to find Milena."

"I understand, Grandpa. I've already offered a substantial reward to the Star Society to help find Milena. I'm waiting for Lexi's response. Hopefully, we'll hear something soon," Cole replied.

Just then, Elliana's phone buzzed with a message from Matthew. "Lexi, how should I respond to Cole?"

Elliana texted back without hesitation. "Tell him-no deal."

What Irene said earlier was too harsh. Elliana refused to offer her help that easily.

Upon hearing Cole's words, Irene's face lit up. "I heard Lexi from the Star Society is incredibly influential. Lexi has never failed a mission. If Lexi takes this on, Milena will definitely be found!"

Right as she finished, Cole's phone rang. Checking the message, he said calmly, "Lexi declined."

Irene's smile froze on her lips. The flicker of hope in Jeff's eyes vanished again. He slumped further down the sofa.

Ruben sighed. "Then we must do everything possible to save Miss Henderson. If not, we must offer enough compensation to ease the hostility."

Later that night, Elliana returned to the bedroom. With Cole still in the study, she hurried through her routine and claimed the bed first. When he finally walked in, she spoke before he could say a word. "I have to take SATs tomorrow. I need proper sleep. I'll take the bed—you can have the sofa."

Cole glanced at Elliana's adorable expression and smiled quietly. Without a word, he walked into the bathroom.

Elliana thought his silence meant agreement. Cheerfully, she curled up in bed and turned off the light. She remembered their wedding night—how rough he'd been—and decided he could stumble around in the dark for the sofa this time.

Ten minutes later, Cole stepped out of the bathroom and paused. The room was dark and quiet. Soft moonlight slipped through the curtains, gently outlining Elliana's figure on the bed. Her breathing was slow and steady.

While away on his business trip, he had missed her scent every night. He longed for the feel of her in his arms, the taste of her lips. Thoughts of her, especially the way she looked the night he left—so beautiful, so tempting—haunted him, leaving him restless and sleepless. Now that they were in the same room, his heart felt settled. But his body told a different story. Heat surged through him, making him ache with a thirst only she could quench.

The room stayed still.

Unbeknownst to him, Elliana wasn't asleep. As he observed her in the darkness, she was secretly watching him too. In the past few days, he used to look at her so openly while she shyly looked away. Tonight, hidden in the dark, her eyes were bold, tracing every inch of him.

He had just finished showering. A towel hung low around his waist, and the heat from his skin still lingered. His sculpted body radiated strength and raw masculinity. His physique was flawless—powerful, lean, and striking. He looked like he walked out of a fashion magazine. Any woman would struggle to look away.

Elliana wasn't immune to his charm. She enjoyed admiring a handsome man, and Cole was in a league of his own. Watching him in the dark felt like a feast for her eyes.

But just as she was enjoying her silent delight, Cole tossed the towel aside and strode straight toward the bed. Before she could react, he lifted the covers and slipped in beside her. The next second, his strong arm wrapped around her and pulled her close.

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"Ah!" Her heart jumped. Everything changed in a flash. She was content just watching from afar. She didn't sign up for this close encounter. "Cole, I believe the sofa was your assigned seat tonight."

"Heh." Cole chuckled and took her small hand, placing it on his waist. "Why settle for Looking when touching feels even better?"

"Who-who was looking?" she stammered, clearly caught.

He ignored her denial, moving her hand up to his waist and then his chest. His voice dipped into a teasing murmur. "Feels different touching me awake, doesn't it? Not like when you were sleepwalking."

Her face burned with embarrassment. His skin was hot against her palm, like it was searing straight through. She didn't remember how it felt to touch him while sleepwalking, so of course, touching him while awake felt different. Still, she muttered stubbornly, "No difference."

"No difference?" "Yes. Just like touching a mannequin."

"Tsk!" He clicked his tongue. "Honey, stop playing dumb. You want me, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's normal for a woman to desire her husband. Why deny it? It's not like I'm turning you down."

"Stop talking!" Elliana quickly pressed her hand over his mouth. He never knew how to be subtle, always making her blush with his words. It was truly overwhelming.

She added, "I admit you caught my eye. But that's all it is. Just a passing thought. Like a girl dreaming of a prince— when she wakes up, the dream's gone. Don't tease me like this."

With her hand still covering his mouth, Cole couldn't reply, so he kissed her palm

instead.

His lips were hot, making her snatch her hand back. Before she could catch her breath, he leaned in and kissed her. Hard. His arms tightened around her, pulling her into his arms.

Elliana wanted to push him away, but her body didn't Listen. Her head spun. His scent was clean and addictive.

She wasn't wearing her wig. Her long hair spilled over the pillow. Cole gathered a handful, gently brushing it through his fingers. He kissed her lips again, then leaned close to her ear and whispered, "Honey, being attracted to me is a good start. I like where this is going."

His towel was barely hanging on now. Elliana felt danger closing in. She pressed her hands to his chest, trying to hold him back. But he was unmovable, like a wall of stone.

He only held her tighter, voice low and deep, "Honey, don't you want to have a more intimate connection with me?"

Elliana couldn't tell if Cole meant to confess something or simply charm her, but whatever it was, it was working a little too well. If this went on any longer, she wasn't sure she'd be able to stop herself from giving in. With her hands pressed against his chest, a futile attempt to create some distance, she said, "I just need some time to figure this out."

For a moment, Cole didn't speak. He hadn't expected her refusal. Weren't women supposed to be driven by emotion? If the mood was right, shouldn't everything have fallen into place on its own? So why did the woman in his arms still need to think things through? Why did she seem calmer than the rest?

Instead of letting go, he pulled her in just a little tighter and murmured near her ear, "Then think, honey. I've got all night."

Elliana nudged him back, firmer this time. "I'm going to need more than just a few hours to sort this out."

Still holding her, Cole asked, "And how long is that supposed to be?"

"By the day after tomorrow," Elliana blurted, not really thinking it through. "I'll have an

answer after the SATs."

Cole let out a long sigh. That long just for an answer? A part of him wanted to deny her the time to think. She was his wife—shouldn't that mean something? Shouldn't she already be his? Still, forcing her wouldn't feel nearly as good as if she came to him on her own.

With obvious reluctance, Cole stepped back. He got off the bed, changed into a fresh pair of pajamas, and stretched out on the couch. It was the first time he'd ever been banished from his own bed—and by his wife, no less. The thought stung more than he cared to admit.

Elliana finally exhaled, the weight in her chest lifting just a little. Sleep had nearly taken her earlier, but after everything that happened just now, she was fully alert.

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Neither of them managed to fall asleep, one shuffling on the bed and the other one shifting on the couch. The silence between movements only made things more uncomfortable.

After a while, Cole was the one who sat up first and said, "Care for a chat?"

Still tucked under the covers, Elliana responded softly, "Sure."

"How do you view the marriage certificate?"

"I heard you sent someone to Podgend to dig into the registration records," she said. "Did they come up with anything?"

"Nothing. Whoever did it wiped everything clean. No names, no paperwork—just gone."

Elliana didn't respond right away. This didn't surprise her. Whoever had the influence to register their marriage without either of them knowing clearly wasn't just anyone. Since the mastermind managed to pull that off, all the traces had likely been wiped clean, leaving nothing behind for anyone to uncover. With Cole coming up empty-handed, it looked like she would have to rely on her own connections to get what she needed...

By morning, Elliana was still in the same bed, wrapped in sheets that felt too soft to leave. She had been awake until late at night and barely got any rest. Though her eyes were open, she had no desire to leave the bed. But the reminder of her SATs pushed her

to force herself up, no matter how much she wanted to stay still.

Cole, already dressed, sat beside her like he'd been waiting. The moment her eyes met his, he offered a crooked smile. "Feeling nervous?"

Part of her wanted to brush it off and say she had it in the bag, but she nodded instead. "Very much. Barely studied, weak foundation—might completely bomb it and embarrass you while I'm at it."

Cole let out a low laugh. For someone claiming to be nervous, she sure looked perfectly calm to him. Truth be told, the nervous one was him. With her promise to give an answer after the exams, he kept imagining the worst—that the spark would die out by then and she'd decide to reject him.

Completely unaware of what was spinning through his mind, Elliana found her own thoughts drifting back to the night before. Her face turned warm, and without a word, she tossed the covers aside and rushed into the bathroom.

After getting dressed, the two of them headed downstairs side by side.

Education was sacred in the Evans household. With Elliana and Trinity both sitting for the SATs, Ruben and several relatives were already up, eager to send them off properly.

A feast of a breakfast waited at the table, and Ruben, ever the family figurehead, shared words of encouragement meant for both girls. Others chimed in with their good wishes, too.

Naturally, all the attention centered around Trinity. Elliana barely registered to them, like they'd already made peace with her being the family disappointment.

Trinity basked in the extra attention lavished on her, so she turned on the charm in earnest. "Thank you so much, Ruben, and thank you all. I promise I won't let any of you down." Then, with a glance that carried zero sincerity, she looked at Elliana. "Good luck, Elliana. Let's both aim to make the Evans name proud."

"Her? As the pride of the Evans family? What a joke." Jeff couldn't resist throwing a jab, even if it would earn him another scolding from Ruben. The urge to belittle Elliana was just too strong. "I mean, casting aside her self-taught education and lack of any teachers to tutor her, the past week witnessed her wandering around while Trinity was buried in prep. Do you seriously think she can pull this off?"



Trinity hid a smirk behind her juice glass. Jeff had done exactly what she hoped—humiliate Elliana in front of everyone without her having to lift a finger.

Elliana cast a cool, disinterested look in Jeff's direction and didn't bother replying. She knew better than to waste words on someone like him. Ignorance would sting more than any insult.

And just as expected, the lack of reaction lit a fire in Jeff. He was fuming.

"Elliana, don't think you're untouchable just because Grandpa's got your back. You're nothing but a lowlife... Ow!" Before Jeff could finish, a biscuit came flying out of nowhere, smacking him square in the mouth and knocking him off his chair with a yelp.

Everyone froze, jaws dropping.

Humiliated, Jeff scrambled up from the floor, glaring at Elliana. "What gives you the right to chuck stuff at me?"

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Elliana took a slow sip of her milk. "Talk smack about me again, and you'll wish you hadn't."

"You!" Jeff rolled up his sleeves, ready to throw hands, but one look at Cole's warning glance made him back off like a scolded dog.

Bertram grabbed Jeff by the collar and shoved him back into his seat. "Pain's gone, and now you forget the lesson, huh? You deserve a smackdown from your cousin-in-Law!"

With Jeff handled, Elliana went back to her breakfast, not sparing Trinity a glance.

Trinity squirmed, her face flushing with embarrassment. She swore to herself that once the SAT results dropped, she'd put Elliana in her place.

After breakfast, Elliana hopped into Cole's car to head to school.

Trinity was itching to ride along but too scared to ask. Cole was obsessive about cleanliness and never let another woman in his car. She shot Elliana a jealous glare, cursing inwardly. How'd that plain Jane get so lucky to get into Cole's car?

At the school gate, Elliana thanked Cole, grabbed her bag, and started to climb out

when he caught her wrist. She turned, expecting some pep talk, but instead, he said, "Don't forget our deal. Once the exams are done, think hard about the answer you're going to give me."

Elliana was speechless. Shouldn't he be telling her to keep her cool during the test, not to freak out, and to double-check her work? Nope, all he cared about was his own desires, like the SATs—his grandpa's big deal—was just a blip on his radar. He wasn't even worried she'd bomb it and make him look bad!

"Fine," she said flatly and then got out.

The next two days were smooth sailing for Elliana—grueling exams by day, chilling at the Evans family's place by night.

By the afternoon of the second day, she'd made up her mind about Cole's question. She couldn't say yes. Her mom's advice from years ago echoed in her head, hinting at some invisible force behind that fateful fire, pulling strings on her and her mother's fates. She had to track down that puppet master and unravel the truth, or she'd never find her mom. With so much on her plate, getting tangled up in romance would only slow her down. Cole was a catch—charming, tempting, but she had to let it go.

Her only reason for sticking with the Evans family was to dig into the mystery of that marriage certificate. Beyond that piece of paper, she and Cole had nothing.

Decision made, she took a deep breath and strolled out of the school gate.

Cole wasn't there to pick her up like the day before. Instead, Paulina was waiting.

Spotting Elliana, Paulina flashed a warm smile and opened the car door. "Mrs. Evans, Mr. Evans got tied up in an emergency meeting, so he sent me to get you."

Elliana nodded and got into the car.

Hugh, behind the wheel again, shot her a frosty glance, not bothering with a hello.

Elliana had clocked his attitude last time when he drove her to Paige's engagement party. He clearly had a chip on his shoulder. She cut to the chase. "You got a problem with me?"

"Yup," Hugh said, not sugarcoating it. "Because I'm not pretty?"

"Being plain's not your fault, but being plain and not knowing your place? That's on you. Mr. Evans, with his talent, looks, and family background, deserves someone on his level. What makes you think you can latch onto him?"

Just then, Paulina hopped in and snapped, "Hugh, don't talk to Mrs. Evans like that!"

Hugh clammed up, clearly intimidated by his big sister, but his stiff neck screamed he wasn't backing down.

Elliana smirked. "Relax, I won't cling to Mr. Evans."

## **Chapter: 56**

Paulina's eyes widened, worried. "Mrs. Evans, don't let this idiot get to you.."

Paulina wanted to say more, but Elliana's phone buzzed, cutting her off.

Glancing at the screen, Elliana saw Kiara's name and picked up. "Hello?"

Kiara's voice dripped with smugness. "Elliana, think you can overshadow Paige with just an empty title? Keep dreaming! Paige has made a powerful comeback, and she's unstoppable. Get ready to crash and burn—this time, you're going down for good!"

With that, Kiara hung up.

Elliana's lips curled into a knowing smirk. That call was a straight-up battle cry. She hadn't kept tabs on the Jones family the past two days, so she had no clue how Paige had staged this big comeback.

Curious, she pulled up Paige's social media and saw it. Paige had done something that had the whole city buzzing.

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Paige unexpectedly posted a photo of herself with Merritt Carman on her social media, with a caption underneath. "From now on, I have a godfather to love me. So much joy!"

This meant Paige became Merritt's goddaughter.

And just who was Merritt, anyway? He was a legendary figure, known for his deep connections to the darker corners of the world.

Starting as a small-time thug working the docks, Merritt had clawed his way to the top, weaving a vast web of influence that stretched far beyond national borders. Back in the day, he had kept a low profile, running quiet maritime operations that only insiders knew about. Most ordinary folks didn't even know his name.

Recently, however, he had stepped into the world of show business, and his company, Royal Entertainment, was home to a constellation of celebrities. As Royal Entertainment's popularity soared, his own presence had followed, turning the name Merritt into one everyone knew.

Because of Merritt's ties to the criminal underworld, various forces kept their distance, and nobody was willing to cross him unless they had no other choice.

Paige's return to the spotlight wasn't just luck-it was strategy. Aligning herself with Merritt gave her an edge no one could ignore. Just two days earlier, she'd taken a hard hit. That engagement party fiasco had gone viral, drawing laughs, memes, and public shame.

"Honestly, Paige caught me off guard. She used to brag about being engaged to Cole, and I once actually admired her. Thought she'd landed a fairytale. Turns out, it was just a story she made up for herself."

"Since the Evans family never promised to marry off a particular daughter from the Jones family, it means both Elliana and Paige were in the running. Why would the Evans family pick the plain-looking Elliana instead of the gifted and stunning Paige? I don't get it."

"Come on, it's clear something's wrong with Paige. The Evans family probably saw it and decided Elliana was the safer option. For a family like that, personality matters more than charm, and Paige's little talents just don't stack up."

The backlash had hit fast. Fans had dropped Paige by the thousands, and her title of Ublento's top socialite had turned into nothing more than an online joke.

But the tides turned fast. As soon as Paige introduced Merritt as her godfather, the public's view of her flipped overnight. Shockwaves rippled through social media.

Nobody saw it coming—Paige teaming up with Merritt? That wasn't just a comeback. It was a total level-up. Being his goddaughter made her old title look laughably small.

Sure, Merritt had been surrounded by plenty of women, but he'd never had a child of his own. With Paige stepping into the role of goddaughter, she was now the unofficial heiress of Royal Entertainment—and possibly the one to inherit his empire. If she ended up inheriting his fortune, what would be the point of marrying into wealth? She wouldn't need a rich husband-she'd be the rich one.

Sure enough, stars from every corner of the industry rushed to Paige's page, filling her feed with praises and congratulations. Their fans did the same, stirring up an extraordinary wave of attention across Paige's social media platforms.

Paige's loyal few who hadn't clicked ""unfollow" suddenly found themselves riding a wave of vindication and excitement.

## **Chapter: 57**

"Paige never stops surprising us! I swear I'll support her forever!"

"Elliana? That plain, washed-up woman might be called Mrs. Evans now, but titles mean nothing when she's one scandal away from being tossed out. Paige, on the other hand, is a different story entirely. With Merritt behind her, fame isn't a dream-it's a guarantee."

"Is it true Paige has finally made her debut in the entertainment industry? I can't wait to see her crush the scene and rise like a phoenix."

The moment Paige publicly announced Merritt as her godfather, the media went into a frenzy. Overnight, every trace of her tainted past seemed to vanish. Her scandals? Forgotten. Her reputation? Rewritten. She was once again everyone's sweetheart.

Bored netizens, always hungry for drama, quickly chose sides. And naturally, they sang praises for Paige while still hurling criticism at Elliana.

Naturally, the flood of fresh hate directed at Elliana wasn't just random-it was Paige pulling the strings from the shadows. The cruelest remarks, calling Elliana "shameless" came from burner accounts Paige had crafted and "worthless, herself."

With calculated sweetness, Paige responded to one of the vicious comments she had written in one of those burner accounts. "There's no point in lingering in the past. I hope peace finds us both someday."

This carefully staged reply instantly triggered another surge of public adoration for Paige.

"Paige is such a gentle soul. Despite everything Elliana's done to her, she still takes the high road. Meanwhile, Elliana just looks like a joke."

"Those old scandals about Paige? Lies, obviously. I bet Elliana made them all up."

"There's clearly more to their history than we know, yet Paige bears the pain in silence. It breaks my heart!"

The internet couldn't get enough—the Elliana vs. Paige saga had become the kind of gripping drama that even television couldn't compete with.

Elliana skimmed the headlines and let out a dry, amused laugh. Sure, Paige using Merritt as her ace in the hole had caught her off guard, but she wasn't fazed. The higher Paige soared, the more spectacular her fall would be, and she would make sure of it.

Right then, Paige sent Elliana a message, saying, "Elliana, do you want to know what really happened with the fire back then? I can tell you the truth..."

The mere mention of the fire from the past made Elliana's chest constrict without warning. Her mother's warnings and the memory of her mother running straight into the fire circled through her thoughts again and again. That fateful fire years back was undoubtedly a conspiracy. Her mother's cryptic advice to conceal her talents and beauty until adulthood had been for survival. Now that she had grown up, it was time to uncover the truth surrounding the fire.

Keeping her face unreadable, Elliana replied to Paige's message. "Can you tell me everything?"

Paige's response immediately came. "Yes, but only if you agree to my terms first."

Elliana raised an eyebrow and wrote. "And what exactly are you asking for?"

Paige fired her response smoothly. "Ever heard of 'The Heiress' Graduation Trip?' Royal Entertainment's pouring cash into it, and I want you on the cast list."

Elliana's eyes thinned into slits as she read Paige's message. She didn't need a second to

decode Paige's angle— this was a setup, clear as day.

Paige was riding a wave of popularity at the moment. She had only just finished college and was getting ready to make her official debut in the entertainment world.

Royal Entertainment crafted "The Heiress' Graduation Trip" as Paige's grand entrance into showbiz. Inviting Elliana wasn't some olive branch—it was a setup, plain and simple.

Paige and Elliana had already sparked a pair of public opinion storms before, which had pulled the powerful Cole into the spotlight. Following Paige's public declaration of Merritt as her godfather, "The Heiress' Graduation Trip" was certain to draw massive attention, packed with enough drama, friction, and buzzworthy moments to keep the audience hooked.

Just like Kiara warned, losing to Paige in front of millions would be Elliana's death sentence in the spotlight—no comebacks, no second chances.

## **Chapter: 58**

Fearing Elliana might refuse, Paige didn't stop at one message—she followed up with more.

"Elliana, don't overthink it. I asked you to join the show with a clean heart. I just want to clear up' the misunderstandings between us. You don't want all those wild theories online to keep spiraling, do you?"

"Like it or not, we're still family. I was heartbroken when you ended up with Cole, but things are different now. I have Raylan, and I'm on the verge of making a name for myself in the entertainment industry. I'm in a good place, and I'm ready to let go of what happened before."

"We're both in the public eye now, and that means we have to consider the message we're sending. The internet's a mess, and people are turning our story into some kind of drama. We need to step up and use this show to rewrite that narrative."

As Elliana scrolled through the messages, she could practically see Paige pacing and racking her mind to persuade her. Her rejection would likely make Paige spiral into one of her signature meltdowns.

In Elliana's mind, Paige and Kiara, this mother—and-daughter pair, were honestly quite the spectacle. One had just announced a full-blown war, swearing to drag her straight to

hell, while the other was suddenly preaching about the importance of family image. Did they forget to rehearse their script before reaching out to her? Clearly, they thought they had the upper hand. Dangling the truth about the fire like a prize, they'd laid a path full of traps, assuming she'd stumble right into them. Alright then, she would go along with their little game and find out who truly landed in hell when it was all over!

Elliana texted back, saying, "Sure, I had already been considering a move into the entertainment industry."

"Great!" Paige shot back almost instantly. "Can't wait to have you on set!"

The moment their chat ended, Elliana's car rolled to a stop in front of the Evans family's residence. She stepped out and walked straight into the living room, ready for whatever drama awaited.

Trinity had beaten Elliana home and was already nestled on the couch, basking in everyone's attention like it was her rightful throne.

Among the eager crowd, Jeff was the loudest cheerleader. "Trinity, you're a lock for top scorer in Ublento. I'd better start thinking of a gift for when the exam results are announced!"

Trinity, clearly delighted, put on a modest front, saying, "Jeff, don't say that. The results haven't been released yet, and there's no guarantee I'll come out on top."

Noticing Elliana walk in, Trinity threw in a theatrical sigh. "Of course, there's always a chance Elliana outshined me."

With both Ruben and Cole out of sight, the room dropped its polite act. Eyes narrowed in Elliana's direction, and Jeff, never one to hold back, sneered, "You think she'll outperform you? Please. She's lucky if she didn't come in dead last."

Irene shot Elliana a smug look, her smile edged with mockery, before going out of her way to act intimately with Trinity right in front of Elliana, making it seem like they were teaming up to push Elliana out. "So, Trinity, now that exams are behind us, what's next for you?"

Trinity gave a dramatic little sigh. "Miss Henderson's condition has been on my mind lately. I've decided to apply to Ublento Medical University to see if I can help Jeff with her treatment." Jeff's face lit up with gratitude. "You're amazing, Trinity!"



With a practiced smile, Trinity added, "I'm not officially enrolled yet, but I've been mentored by Professor Murray Sampson for two years. He says I'm his brightest prospect and plans to recommend me to Milena once my scores are in."

Milena? The mention alone snapped everyone to attention.

Just as if it had been timed, Ruben came down the staircase, catching the tail end of the conversation. His eyes lit up. "Trinity, are you saying you can actually contact Milena?"

Murray wasn't just any professor—he was one of Ublento Medical University's elite. The Evans family had tried to bring him in for Miss Henderson before, but it had led nowhere. No one had ever heard of him having a direct line to Milena.

Trinity tilted her head, letting the suspense stretch. "Well"

Once all eyes were on her, Trinity drawled, "Over the past few years, Ublento Medical University has risen through the ranks, catching Milena's attention in the process. Without delay, she reached out to the university's president, pitching a collaborative venture that sparked immediate interest. The president didn't hesitate—he approved the idea wholeheartedly. To facilitate the connection, the president brought in Professor Sampson, a seasoned figure at Ublento Medical University, to serve as the bridge between their team and Milena. Professor Sampson later informed me that he intended to involve me in the research project, offering me a rare opportunity to gain hands-on experience at the very onset of my academic path."

Pleased with shock looks, she added, "Professor Sampson added that someone with my potential shouldn't settle for mediocrity—I should set my sights higher. With that in mind, he expressed his determination to advocate for me personally, hoping to persuade Milena to accept me under her wing. Should that fall into place, she would then put forth my name to the International Medical Association, granting me access to a stage reserved for the elite in global medicine."

Trinity's declaration left the entire room momentarily speechless, their faces a mix of surprise and admiration. Milena's name alone commanded global respect in medical circles, and the International Medical Association stood as its crowning symbol. To imagine Trinity—still just a teenager—being associated with that world elevated her in everyone's eyes, transforming her into someone extraordinary in an instant.

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The Evans family, in particular, was practically glowing with excitement at the prospect of Trinity becoming Milena's student.

Ruben exclaimed, "Marvelous! Trinity, you're incredible! If you manage to build a connection with Milena, that means our family could speak to her directly, and Miss Henderson's matter could be taken care of effortlessly. How wonderful!"

With a warm smile, Trinity responded, "I just want to be helpful. Jeff's burdens are mine to carry as well. I'll do everything I can to make all of you proud of me."

Ruben gave an approving nod, visibly moved by her words.

Unable to contain his joy, Jeff threw his arms around Trinity. "I am so lucky to have you as family, Trinity!"

Elliana stayed silent, but her lips curved ever so slightly. As Milena herself, how could she be unaware of any collaboration with Ublento Medical University or that she had reached out to the university president?

While these thoughts buzzed in her head, Ruben turned to her with a lighthearted tone. "So, Elliana, now that the exams are out of the way, how do you think it went?"

Snapping out of her thoughts, Elliana answered, "I think I did alright."

"Have you already picked out a university you like? What are you thinking of doing down the road?" Ruben pressed on.

Elliana found herself momentarily thrown off by the sudden questions. She only sat through the exams to keep Ruben off her back. College? She hadn't given it much thought. When it came to her future, she had been Laying the groundwork since she was a kid. Most of those pieces were already in place. There wasn't anything new she needed to figure out.

Still, one path remained untouched—the entertainment world. And lately, it had started to spark her curiosity. Most importantly, if she made a name for herself in this field, her mother, wherever she was, might catch a glimpse of her on screen and learn more about her. That silent hope was why she said yes to Paige's offer to join "The Heiress ' Graduation Trip."

Elliana paused for a moment and then said calmly, "I've decided to pursue acting. I want

to try the entertainment industry."

"What did you say?" Hearing this, the room seemed to tilt off balance.

Jeff, never one to hold back his barbed tongue, sneered, "Seriously, Elliana? Are you delusional? You think someone with your average looks can survive in that industry? Aren't you afraid of being criticized harshly?"

Irene let out a sharp little laugh. "Don't take this the wrong way, Elliana, but the entertainment industry isn't exactly welcoming to people who don't fit the ideal. It's full of stunners, and you're... Well, you're not there. Just think about what kind of embarrassment that could bring to the Evans family."

"I'll be honest, Jeff wasn't exactly kind, but he's not wrong. You don't need a diploma to get into showbiz, sure. And if your scores tank, it might seem like a fallback. But let's not pretend it's easy. That industry worships beauty, and it's brutal to anyone who doesn't stand out. Maybe think it through before diving in," Trinity interjected.

Her words implied that Elliana had already given up on higher education and was grasping at a last resort— completely unaware of the storm that world could bring.

Ruben's face tightened with unease. "Elliana, did you even talk to Cole about this before deciding?" he asked carefully.

Right on cue, Cole walked in, and every head in the room swung his way.

Always quick to fan the flames, Jeff exclaimed, "Cole! Elliana just said she wants to break into the entertainment world!"

Instead of the outrage they anticipated, Cole simply raised an eyebrow and smiled at Elliana. "If that's what you want, go for it. Should I back you financially?"

A stunned silence gripped the room—no one had seen this coming. Cole's sharp mind had dulled ever since he married a woman they all quietly labeled as plain.

Even Elliana didn't see that answer coming. She gave a small smile and said, "Thanks, but I won't need your money. I'll figure it out on my own."

There were plenty of eye rolls. As far as they were concerned, even with Cole's wallet

wide open, she'd still struggle to get noticed. And now she wanted to do it without any help?

### **Chapter: 60**

Ruben looked like he was about to object, but Cole's unexpected support shut his mouth before the words could leave.

A long pause settled over the room before Ruben rose to his feet and said, "Elliana, upstairs. We need to talk."

Without saying a word, Elliana got up and followed him.

Everyone shot each other knowing looks. No one dared call Cole out for indulging his wife, but they were all convinced Ruben wouldn't let things slide. They sat back, fully expecting Elliana to get a scolding upstairs.

Elliana shared the same thoughts as those downstairs, assuming Ruben would either use threats or persuasive words to talk her out of joining the entertainment world.

But when she stepped into the study, Ruben's behavior took an unexpected turn. He gestured her in with a cryptic wave. "Elliana, shut the door and have a seat."

Thrown by his tone, she hesitated, but eventually shut the door behind her, crossed the room, and lowered herself into the chair facing him.

Ruben straightened his posture, both hands loosely clasped over his cane, his expression unusually kind as he studied her. "I need to ask you something important, and I want the truth."

"Alright. What is it?" "Have you and Cole slept together?"

Elliana nearly swallowed wrong and coughed, caught off guard mid-breath. Was he seriously asking that? Of all things?

She gaped at him, too stunned to speak, and Ruben's genial expression abruptly cooled into disapproval. "I'll take that as no, then."

Elliana offered a strained smile, which Ruben immediately interpreted as confirmation.

He let out a sharp, irritated grunt. "I knew that rascal Cole was just putting on a damn performance for my sake! Back in the day, he acted like he was too good for everyone -

never spared a second glance for any girl. Now he thinks he can play me for a fool? Not a chance. Don't worry, Elliana. I'll make sure everything goes according to plan. Whether he likes it or not, it's going to happen."

Elliana reached up and brushed the side of her nose, hesitant to admit that the problem wasn't Cole—it was her own unwillingness.

He added, "But Elliana, you can't expect me to do all the work. You've got to step up. Cole's a proud, hardheaded guy. You'll have to make him look past the surface and recognize what makes you special. That's how you build a real bond... And once you give him a child, he won't stray an inch."

Elliana stayed silent, offering no opinion, only lowering her head as she listened.

After what felt like forever, Ruben finally ran out of things to say. "You got all that, right?"

Elliana dipped her head with practiced politeness. "I got it, Ruben."

"Good girl." A satisfied grin crossed Ruben's face at her demeanor. "You can go now. I'll handle everything tonight."

Elliana didn't know what he intended to "handle," but anything was better than enduring more of his rambling. She stood quickly and slipped out before he could start again.

Back in her room, she shut the door behind her without a word. Downstairs, a few nosy relatives were still loitering, waiting for the show. They expected her to come storming down in tears, but the one summoned next was Cole.

Jeff, always sniffing around for gossip, leaned in with a smug grin. "See? Elliana probably got torn to shreds up there and ran off crying. Now it's Cole's turn—bet Grandpa's laying into him for not keeping her under control."

A round of murmurs with nods followed.

But behind the study doors, the reality was far from what they imagined.