

Chapter 560 Darling's Visit

After Eva ended the call, restlessness consumed Cole like a fever. He craved answers from Eva but feared pulling himself deeper into whatever web she'd spun around him.

Minutes stretched as Cole weighed his options, until clarity struck. His grandfather would have the truth he needed.

Cole's car glided to a stop in front of the Evans Mansion. He stepped onto the gravel drive and froze at unexpected cat meows.

Animal fur had triggered his allergies since boyhood. The mansion's ironclad rule banned all pets. So where had this cat materialized from?

His eyes swept the grounds until they landed on a snow-white kitten positioned three meters away, watching him with unblinking curiosity while meowing incessantly.

Just then, Jeff materialized from nowhere and swept the kitten into his protective embrace before Cole could process what he'd witnessed.

"Your cat?" Cole's question cut through the tension.

Jeff's face hardened with poorly concealed displeasure. "Yes." The word dropped like a stone between them. He pivoted away, cradling his feline companion.

Cole's jaw tightened as confusion clouded his features. Ever since his return from overseas, Jeff had treated him like a stranger—worse than a stranger. What transgression had he committed to earn such hostility? The pet rule stood absolute, yet Jeff flaunted his defiance by letting the creature roam freely in his presence. The audacity stung.

Lance's return broke the standoff.

"Hey, Cole." Lance's greeting carried practiced politeness.

Maturity had taught Lance to mask his emotions while Jeff wore his on

his sleeve. Though grievances simmered beneath Lance's composed surface, he maintained the facade of family harmony.

But Cole read between the lines—Lance harbored the same mysterious displeasure toward him.

Months of enduring their cold shoulders had worn Cole's patience thin. "Lance, I need the truth. What did I do? Why do you and Jeff treat me like I've committed some unforgivable sin?"

Lance's composure faltered for a heartbeat. Both he and Jeff understood the cruel irony—Cole bore no responsibility for most of what had transpired. Elliana's death and Cole's memory loss of her had wiped the slate clean. Logic demanded they move forward and leave the past buried.

Yet, neither Lance nor Jeff could release their grip on Elliana's ghost. Their admiration for her had transformed into distaste toward Cole, irrational though it seemed.

"You're reading too much into things." Lance's voice carried forced lightness. "Jeff and I recently lost someone precious to us. Grief has made us poor company, nothing more."

Cole's penetrating gaze searched Lance's face, hunting for cracks in the carefully constructed lie. "Someone precious? Who?"

"A friend Jeff and I cherished. Someone who meant nothing to you."

Ruben's decree echoed in Lance's mind—Elliana's name must never pass their lips, especially not within Cole's hearing. Cole had forgotten Elliana completely. Her death had severed all connections.

Lance and Jeff missed Elliana privately, honoring her memory through silence.

Sensing he'd hit a wall, Cole shifted tactics. "Why does Jeff keep a cat?"

Darling possessed remarkable intelligence for such a small creature. The kitten had embarked on an epic journey this morning, crossing half the city from Rosewood Villa to reach the Evans Mansion on four tiny paws—a pilgrimage to visit Jeff.

Jeff had once been Darling's devoted caretaker, holding her during meals

and sleep, showering her with unconditional affection. The kitten's memory held every gentle touch from the bald-headed boy who'd become her world.

Back when Elliana departed Regal Grove, she'd entrusted Heather with Darling's care, and Darling had been well cared for.

Yet, oblivious to this, the Evans family believed Elliana's supposed death had rendered Darling a stray cat, making today's appearance seem like a pure coincidence.

Jeff's reunion with Darling had awakened fierce protectiveness. He carried her everywhere now, lavishing her with treats and attention, terrified of losing this precious connection to what he'd just regained.

Lance shared that devotion—with Elliana gone forever, caring for her beloved cat felt like honoring her.

Cole's question drew a weighty sigh from Lance, "The kitten's name is Darling. She belonged to a friend who's... no longer with us. Jeff and I want to care for the cat now, as our friend would have wanted. We hope you'll allow the cat to stay."

"It's fine with me," Cole replied before approaching the mansion's entrance.

Something inexplicable had stirred within him at the sight of that white kitten—not the usual revulsion his allergies typically triggered, but an odd sense of recognition. The feeling puzzled him, but urgent matters demanded his attention. His mother's secrets wouldn't unravel themselves.

The living room buzzed with quiet conversation as Ruben held court with Bertram and Emmanuel from his throne-like sofa, while the younger Evans generation clustered nearby, absorbed in their digital worlds.

Jason occupied his usual spot in the family circle.

Trinity remained conspicuously absent—her humiliation at Ublento Medical University had driven her into self-imposed exile for days.

Cole turned his attention to Ruben and said, "Grandpa, I have something important to discuss with you."