

Chapter 561 Hiding Something

These days, whenever Cole stepped into any room within the Evans household, the very air seemed to thicken with unspoken dread. Voices dropped to cautious whispers, everyone terrified that any careless mention of Elliana's name might trigger something in Cole.

While no one knew precisely what that would entail, Ruben's orders had been crystal clear, and defying him was unthinkable.

Right now, as Cole materialized in the living room doorway, a cluster of family members, previously hunched over their phones exchanging whispered gossip, fell silent as stones. Across the expansive space, Ruben, Bertram, and Emmanuel severed their conversation mid-sentence.

In the far corner, Jeff and Lance lavished attention on Darling, stroking the cat with tenderness, as if the cat were the only thing in the world that mattered.

Louisa perched beside Emmanuel, her face an impenetrable mask of studied indifference.

Irene presented a stark contrast, practically glowing as she examined her freshly polished nails. Ever since word of Elliana's death had reached them, she had been floating through the halls with barely contained jubilation. With Cole's mother vanished without a trace and Elliana permanently removed from the equation, the mantle of Evans matriarch had returned to her shoulders. She reigned supreme once more—how could such triumph not intoxicate her?

Jason alone maintained his composure, greeting Cole with characteristic respect. "Cole."

Cole returned the acknowledgment with a brief nod before his attention shifted to Ruben.

Ruben met Cole's gaze, his weathered features twisted with conflicted



emotions. "Let's retreat upstairs and speak privately."

Cole moved without hesitation, extending his arm to steady Ruben as they climbed the stairs together.

Within the second-floor study's oak-paneled sanctuary, Ruben claimed the sofa's most commanding position, his gaze never leaving Cole's face.

Ruben carried the weight of knowing that Eva had slipped into Cole's room late one night, that they had spoken for a while before she fled into the night. This knowledge had gnawed at him relentlessly.

Decades ago, Eva had shattered Ruben's heart and dragged the Evans family name through an unspeakable scandal. The agonizing decision to cast her out, made alongside Jarrett's iron resolve, had demanded every ounce of Ruben's patriarchal strength. As the previous head of the Evans dynasty, he never retreated from his pronouncements. He had severed all ties with his daughter, accepting that chapter as permanently closed.

Yet, here stood Cole, his memory fragmented like shattered glass, engaged to Eva's adopted daughter. This twist of fate had woven the Evans bloodline back into Eva's orbit. Should Wanda become Cole's wife, Eva's return to the Evans family fold would prove inevitable.

Had Eva married beneath her station, this complication would barely register. Instead, she had allied herself with the Campbell dynasty, a house wielding equal power and influence. This delicate balance teetered on a razor's edge. One miscalculated move could ignite a devastating war between the two families.

The Evans clan harbored no desire to make an enemy of the Campbells, much less engage in a blood feud that could destroy both houses.

Unfortunately, sharing these complexities with Cole was out of the question.

Eliana's final instructions before departing Ublento had been unambiguous. Cole was in a fragile state of mental reconstruction. His psyche required organic healing, free from external pressure. Forcing him to confront memories linked to his Psycephrenia could shatter his progress entirely, erasing months of painstaking recovery.

Ruben observed Cole through the lengthening silence before releasing a

weary sigh and summoning a brittle smile. "What weighs on your mind?"

Cole's brow creased as he studied his grandfather with growing intensity. When consciousness had first returned to him on that distant island, his mother's supposed dying wish had consumed his every thought, blinding him to the subtle currents swirling around him. Now, with a clearer perspective, he recognized how strangely his father and grandfather had been acting ever since.

His grandfather had always been such a vibrant force. He could command the room effortlessly with his formidable authority when circumstances demanded it, but those moments were rare exceptions. Typically, he embodied perpetual youth—quick with clever jokes, delighting in teasing the younger generation, and occasionally feigning wounded pride to get his way.

But those days had vanished completely. Now, his grandfather wore sorrow like a second skin. Even his smiles appeared hollow, mere masks concealing a bone-deep exhaustion that seemed to drain his very essence.

The change extended beyond his grandfather. His father's transformation was equally disturbing. Not once since awakening had he witnessed his father's genuine smile. The man wandered through each day, consumed by invisible burdens, lost in labyrinthine thoughts. Most peculiar of all, his father intended to abandon his own son's engagement celebration, as though he were desperately avoiding the entire affair.

Cole had noted that the remaining family members displayed similar peculiarities. They maintained proper deference toward him, yet something darker lurked beneath their respectful facades.

Repeatedly, he had interrupted hushed conversations that died the instant he appeared. They would freeze like guilty children, their expressions suggesting unmistakable concern that he would overhear something.


Every sign pointed toward one inescapable conclusion: something monumental had occurred, something they were collectively concealing from him. But what could it be? What secret demanded such desperate protection that even he, the current family head, was being kept in the dark?

Cole assembled these fragments in his mind before fixing Ruben with an unwavering stare. "Grandpa, are you and Dad concealing something significant from me?"

Ruben's body went rigid. He searched Cole's face intently, his mind racing to formulate an appropriate response. He couldn't penetrate Cole's thoughts, nor could he determine exactly what dangerous territory Cole's question was probing.

After the silence stretched taut between them, Ruben selected his words with surgical precision. "What specifically are you questioning?"



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