

## Chapter 578 A Hasty Escape

At first, Lance and Jeff tread carefully, fearing the owner of the mansion, Lilah, might be offended by their request to search for the cat. To their surprise, the returning bodyguard suddenly adopted a welcoming demeanor. This unexpected warmth left them pleasantly surprised.

Still, neither Lance nor Jeff dared to believe the invitation meant any special regard for them. In their minds, it was likely Lilah's fondness for Jason that had opened the door, and they were merely riding along on that courtesy.

Whatever Lilah's motives, Lance and Jeff focused only on one thing—finding Darling. Everything else was secondary.

Taylor shared their mindset and felt consumed by envy. He couldn't resist criticizing Jason for being shameless, telling him to back off from pursuing Lilah, while secretly trying to charm her. Jason had acted swiftly, winning her approval to get in with his good looks and charm.

Realizing Jason had already secured Lilah's attention, Taylor resolved to step aside gracefully, preparing himself to acknowledge her as Jason's chosen partner.

But when Taylor tried to trail in after Lance and Jeff, Damian stepped in his way. "I'm sorry, sir. My lady's instructions were clear—only those two are welcome. You'll have to remain outside."

Taylor stopped short, his eyes flashing. "What do you mean I can't go in? I came with them! Do you even realize who you're talking to? I'm Taylor Evans—an award-winning actor, and Jason's cousin!"

Damian answered with nothing but a smirk before swinging the heavy iron gate shut in Taylor's face.

"Hey! Wait up, you guys—" Taylor called after Lance and Jeff, his pride stinging bitterly. His temper flared, and he lashed out with a kick against the gate. "Lance! You're really not going to defend me? I'm your brother!"

Turning back with irritation, Lance snapped in a hushed but firm tone, "Taylor, enough. Don't embarrass yourself here—go home."

Without another word, Lance and Jeff fell in step behind Damian and disappeared into the villa.

Left behind, Taylor seethed with humiliation and anger. The thought that Jason feared a little competition and had come up with a plan to shut him out stirred up his stubborn side. If they thought he'd quietly walk away, they were wrong—he'd stay put out of sheer defiance!

Taylor's petty resistance went unnoticed as Damian ushered Lance and Jeff into a side lounge. At the same time, Elliana descended the stairs, stopping in front of Jason.

Jason, who had been waiting for the Death Thorn in bewilderment, shot to his feet in shock when Elliana came into view. "Elliana? How could you be here?"

After a stunned silence, he blurted out, "You're alive?"

Elliana gave him a sly smile, fingers combing through her unruly wig. "Did you really think the Death Thorn could be finished off so easily? I only toyed with those who tried to hunt me down."

The words knocked Jason silent, leaving his mouth dry. His eyes locked on her, but inside his head, a storm of fractured thoughts crashed over one another.

For what felt like forever, his gaze refused to leave her face. Only after a long struggle did he steady his emotions.

His sharp instincts began arranging the puzzle pieces, and at last, the tangled sequence of events became clear.

The realization brought a bitter laugh to his lips, followed swiftly by a wave of shame. The woman he had long desired was none other than Elliana—the same woman he had once heartlessly tried to cast out of the Evans family. The irony made him feel utterly ridiculous. Could this entire cruel twist be counted as Elliana's calculated revenge? The truth cut into him like a blade, leaving wounds across his heart.

At last, he grasped why Cole cherished his "ugly" wife. Elliana wasn't

unattractive at all, but rather breathtakingly beautiful. Cole had been secretly enjoying the delight of marrying a stunning wife, while the others were clueless.

Humiliation washed over Jason in waves, dragging him down into bitter disappointment. Words failed him, and all he wanted was to don his mask again and vanish completely.

Elliana said nothing, simply waiting with quiet patience while he tried to compose himself.

When the silence stretched too long, Jason finally blurted out, "Do you have a mask?"

A beat later, he added, "Something that actually suits me."

Elliana smiled lightly and said, "I have one."

She crossed the room to a cabinet, opened it, and pulled out a mask before offering it to him.

The mask looked much like the one Jason had worn in the past, and it fit him perfectly.

Jason accepted the mask and slipped it over his face. Once his face was hidden, relief settled over him. At least Elliana couldn't see his embarrassment, and that small comfort helped him steady himself.

Jason asked, his voice more controlled, "What's really going on between you and Cole?"

Because Elliana trusted Jason's loyalty to the Evans family, she didn't hold back. "Your grandpa already knows the truth. Ask him when you get home."

Jason gave a quick nod, clearly unwilling to stay any longer. "Goodbye," he said before rushing out.

No sooner had the word left his mouth than he bolted, his exit looking more like an escape than a farewell.

Jason had faced life-and-death moments without ever flinching, yet this was the first time he had ever turned and fled.

As Jason's figure disappeared from sight, Elliana let out a soft laugh and brushed a hand through her unruly wig. Who would have imagined Jason could be so endearing?

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