

Chapter 699 Flawless Performance

The moment the concert ended, Irene had vanished into the night and made her way back to Ublento. She had spent the entire night wide awake, pacing and waiting for some word about whether her plan had worked. When the news finally came, it brought nothing but bitter disappointment—another failure to add to her growing list.

Just minutes before Jason's video call, Irene had been taking a pair of sharp scissors to her expensive jewelry collection, cutting through necklaces and earrings in a frantic attempt to release the volcanic anger burning inside her chest. The only thing stopping her from completely destroying her room was the fear that someone might hear the commotion and come asking questions.

For what felt like an eternity, she had been getting so close to victory, only to watch everything fall apart just when success seemed within her grasp. This latest attempt had been her most carefully planned operation—an elaborate web of manipulation designed to be absolutely foolproof. And somehow, it had still gone wrong.

She couldn't fathom it. Did Cole have some kind of supernatural protection watching over him? What made this man so impossibly difficult to eliminate?

Her hands were busy shredding a strand of pearls when Jason's name appeared on her phone screen. Even though fury was still coursing through her veins, she quickly arranged her features into a calm, loving expression.

The call connected to reveal Jason's face, and she immediately switched to her most nurturing, motherly voice. "Jason, sweetheart, you're calling quite early today. Is everything all right?"

While Irene was putting on her perfect performance of maternal warmth, Jason looked like he had been carved from ice. His face was completely emotionless, and his eyes held a depth of pain and disappointment that

made her stomach clench with unease.

The sight of him looking so devastated sent alarm bells ringing in her head. She leaned closer to her phone screen, genuine worry creeping into her voice. "Jason, what's happened? You look absolutely dreadful."

"Taylor's gone. He's dead," Jason stated in a voice completely stripped of all feeling.

Of course, Irene already knew about Taylor's death. Taylor wasn't her child, so his death meant absolutely nothing to her beyond the fact that her plan had failed once again. She felt no sadness, only irritation at the waste. But she doctored her expression into pure shock and devastation. "Taylor's dead? How is that even possible? He was performing at the concert just hours ago! I was following the news coverage online—everyone was saying his duet with Stellara was the most incredible performance they'd ever witnessed!"

If there was one thing Irene excelled at, it was putting on a convincing show when the situation demanded it. She was completely confident that her act was absolutely flawless and believable. But something about the way Jason was staring at her made her skin crawl. His gaze was sharp and calculating, filled with a cold mockery that seemed to cut right through her carefully constructed facade. Even through the phone screen, she could feel the humiliating burn of his judgment, as if he could see straight into her rotten soul. Seeds of doubt began planting themselves in her mind.

Jason continued to study her face for several long, uncomfortable moments. Then, without warning, he shifted his phone's camera away from himself and pointed it downward, showing her the terrifying drop that stretched out below where he was standing. His voice remained completely flat and dead when he spoke again. "Take a good look, Mom. Do you see what's down there beneath my feet?"

Just seconds before, the camera had been focused on his face with nothing but sky visible behind him, giving Irene no clue about where he might be. But now, as she stared down into the horrifying chasm that yawned beneath him, her heart nearly stopped beating. She recognized this place immediately—it was Beakcliff. The rocky outcropping he was standing on stretched out into empty air like the beak of some massive bird of prey. It was the most recognizable and dangerous spot along the entire cliff face.

"Jason, what are you doing at Beakcliff?" Irene's voice came out sharp and panicked.

According to everything she knew, all the Evans family members had already left the area and returned home. So why was Jason still there, standing in that terrible place? Every maternal instinct she possessed was screaming in terror at the sight of her son balanced so precariously on the edge of certain death. One wrong step, one moment of lost balance, and he would plummet to the exact same fate that had claimed Taylor.

Pure panic flooded through her entire body. "Jason, please step back from there right now! You're standing far too close to the edge—it's incredibly dangerous!"

Jason could sense the raw worry radiating from her voice, and he knew without question that it came from a place of authentic maternal love. There had never been a moment when he questioned whether his mother truly cared for him. Yet, lurking beneath all that genuine affection lived something dark and twisted. This painful contradiction felt like a blade slowly cutting through his heart.

After showing her the terrifying drop below, Jason slowly moved his phone's camera in a wide arc, giving Irene a complete view of the barren, windswept clifftop where he stood.

The peak stretched endlessly upward, its surface so sheer and brutal that it seemed impossible anyone could have climbed up here without special equipment.

When Irene noticed there was no private helicopter anywhere in sight, and none of Jason's usual security team was visible, her bewilderment only grew deeper. "Jason, what are you doing up there all by yourself? Where did all your men go? And where's your private jet?"

Jason rotated the phone back toward his own face, completely ignoring every question she had just asked. His features remained disturbingly calm and emotionless. "Taylor threw himself off this exact spot where I'm standing right now. Down there below us lies an ancient wilderness that the locals have always called the 'Death Zone.' There's no chance he'll ever be coming back from that fall."

A wave of panic crashed through Irene's chest like ice water. Jason's

expression stayed perfectly neutral, but something deadly cold had settled into his eyes that made her feel like her blood was freezing in her veins.

"Tell me something, Mom," he said suddenly, his voice soft but carrying a razor-sharp edge. "You were there for Taylor's entire childhood. He was always such a happy, peaceful kid who never caused trouble for anyone. He posed absolutely no threat to you whatsoever. How could you possibly find it in your heart to destroy someone so innocent?"

The moment those words left his mouth, Irene felt her rapidly beating heart come to a complete stop. A few seconds later, it burst back to life, hammering against her ribs in pure terror. Every drop of color vanished from her face, and it seemed like hours passed before she could force any words from her throat. "Jason, I... I have absolutely no idea what you're trying to suggest."

In her desperation to cover up her guilt, she quickly cut him off before he could say anything else. "I'm devastated by Taylor's death, but I had nothing whatsoever to do with what happened to him! How can you possibly blame me for this tragedy?"

"Ha." A brief, bitter sound escaped from somewhere deep in his chest. He couldn't believe she was still maintaining this elaborate charade even now. She really had always thought of him as nothing more than a gullible fool who would believe whatever story she fed him.

When his cold laughter faded away, his voice turned hard as forged steel. "Mom, tell me whether you're the one who had that AI chip implanted in Taylor's brain."

Irene had been preparing to force tears from her eyes, ready to put on a heartbreaking performance of wounded innocence, but his words hit her like a physical blow. She could only stare at his image on her phone screen in complete shock, her mind completely blank and unable to form any response at all.