

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

### Chapter: 9

Cole gave her face one look and nearly lost his composure. A twitch of the lip, barely suppressed. Without a word, he handed the wig to her.

There was no use pretending anymore. Elliana slammed the tousled wig onto her head right in front of him.

That made Cole's eye twitch. "Try not to give my grandpa a heart attack. Maybe ease up on the haunted doll look."

Before Elliana could throw a word back, Cole grabbed her hand and led her straight out the door.

The hall downstairs stood prim and polished, every detail already in place.

At the head of the long room, Ruben occupied the central seat, while Jarrett Evans—Cole's father—sat stiffly at his right. The rest of the clan had taken their places, completing the somber formation.

Laughter and murmured conversation had filled the hall, but the moment Cole and Elliana stepped in—hands clasped together like they had something to prove—the entire room stiffened.

Thanks to the eavesdropper from last night, Ruben already knew their room hadn't exactly been quiet last night. Most in the family didn't buy into the idea that Cole would lay a finger on a woman they thought was beneath him. Whispers leaned more toward violence than intimacy. They were expecting to see Elliana limping in, bruised and humiliated. Instead, they got a picture of a peaceful couple. Cole was calm, casual, and utterly at ease.

A silent wave passed through the room as glances darted from one relative to another. Had the couple actually had sex? The tension deepened. No one had seen this coming—the pride of the Evans family, apparently into women who didn't match their glossy standards.

Either oblivious or uncaring, Cole moved forward without hesitation, gently guiding Elliana by the hand as they began greeting the elders.

Ruben's family tree split into four distinct limbs, with three sons and one daughter, all of whom had built families of their own.

Jarrett, the firstborn and former leader, had stepped back from leadership when his health began to decline.

Bertram Evans came next, then Emmanuel Evans, and finally their sister, Eva Evans.

Tradition demanded that the newlywed start the greeting trip with the patriarch. Ruben received the first greetings, Jarrett the second. Neither looked thrilled to be served by Elliana, but neither made a scene. They nodded politely and went through the motions.

Once the formalities were done, the whole family moved to the breakfast table.

Every seat around the oversized table was filled. As Elliana glanced from face to face, the stares felt sharp—some merely curious, others full of judgment or thinly veiled ridicule. Not a drop of warmth in sight. Not that it fazed her. She sat straight, untouched by their stares.

Just then, Bertram's wife, Irene Evans, lifted her chin with a proud tilt and said in a smug, cutting voice, "Elliana, do you realize the entire city is practically counting down the days until Cole ends up a widower?"

Elliana had spent the day before doing her homework on the Evans clan, and it didn't take long for her to see that Irene wielded considerable influence.

Jarrett had led the Evans family in those earlier years, and while tradition said the role of matriarch should have gone to his wife, she had disappeared fifteen years back, leaving nothing behind—not even a reason. Irene had stepped in before anyone could ask who was next, and she never gave the seat back.

Even in her forties, Irene looked flawless. She had the poise of someone used to being admired, her clothes looked expensive and carefully chosen, and her cold, sculpted features hinted at a woman who calculated every move.

Elliana could immediately sense the hostility that Irene was hiding behind her polished

facade. Still, she feigned ignorance and said, "Actually, I haven't really kept up with the news these days."

This response knocked Irene slightly off balance, like she'd taken a swing and hit nothing but air. She'd been counting on humiliating Elliana in front of everyone. If Elliana lost her cool and rubbed Ruben or Jarrett the wrong way, there'd be no chance anyone would support her as the new matriarch. But Elliana's answer had completely thrown a wrench in her plan.

Taking a deep breath, Irene pressed on. "Let me get straight to the point, Elliana. Cole was supposed to marry Paige. You were a last-minute replacement, and that caused a storm online. The gossip's gotten out of hand, and it's dragging down the Evans Group's stock price. Paige has a massive fanbase, and they're tearing you apart on every platform you can think of. Since you're now officially Cole's wife, it falls on you to protect the Evans family's reputation. Wouldn't you agree that keeping the Evans name clean is the least you could do?"

There was no mistaking Irene's message. She wanted Elliana to be the one to sweep up the mess.

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Considering how loud the backlash had gotten, even a statement from the Evans Group might not be enough to silence it. Irene knew that. This wasn't just a request—it was a setup dressed as responsibility.

Irene dressed her manipulation with a smile. "Elliana, I'm only trying to help you grow into your new role. You're the matriarch now, and managing this large family is part of your role."

Just then, a voice chimed in, clearly disapproving, "What makes her qualified to be the matriarch of the family? This family is packed with scholars and high achievers. How's someone like her supposed to lead anything? All she knows is how to lounge around and be useless!"

The speaker, Jeff Evans, Irene's young son, might've only been eight, but he already acted like the world owed him something. Spoiled to the bone, he strutted around like a pint-sized dictator.

Irene's lips curled into a pleased smirk as she gave her son quiet praise—Jeff always knew just what to say, like a well-trained echo of her own thoughts.

As Jeff's cruel words echoed in the room, a few people exchanged amused looks or muttered under their breath. A poised young woman interjected with a sugar-coated tone, "Jeff, that's not how we speak to family. Elliana is Cole's wife, and she deserves our respect."

Turning to Elliana, she offered a warm, practiced smile. "Please don't take it personally, Elliana. Jeff is just a kid. He doesn't know any better."

At first glance, it seemed like she had come to Elliana's defense. But the real move? She had cornered Elliana. Any reaction now would make Elliana look small for clapping back at a kid. What a cunning move. This young woman knew exactly how to play the game.

Elliana turned her gaze toward the voice, steady and unbothered, already knowing who it belonged to. That was Trinity Craig-the girl the Evans family had taken in as their own. She was a senior at Kant High School, busy getting ready for her SATs.

Trinity's grandmother had shared a strong friendship with Ruben's wife, Diane Evans. Over the years, their families grew tightly connected through business. It wasn't unusual for them to host events side by side, keeping those ties alive.

Trinity had been raised like a princess in the Evans home, practically one of their own. She'd grown up with the boys and held a special place in Diane's heart, which only made her shine brighter in everyone else's eyes.

Everyone knew the whispers. The older generation had always hoped to unite the two families through marriage. All it would take was for one Evans boy to fall for Trinity.

After years of staying two steps ahead of Kiara and her daughter, Elliana had learned how to catch the smallest signs of a hidden motive. It took her no time at all to see past Trinity's soft-spoken charm and picture-perfect manners. Trinity had her sights set on Cole. No surprise there-of course Trinity saw her as competition.

"You're being way too nice, Trinity!" Jeff sneered and glared at Elliana like she was something stuck to his shoe. "That woman is not good enough to deserve me respect anyway."

Up until now, Cole had remained silent, his demeanor as icy as ever. At Jeff's words, his stare turned sharp, and he challenged. "If my wife doesn't deserve your respect, then maybe I don't either. Is that what you meant?"

His words weren't shouted, and his tone stayed calm, but the pressure behind them hit hard. Jeff's confidence cracked instantly. "C-Cole, that's not what I meant..."

Jeff could talk back to anyone in the family-except Cole. That was the one line he never dared to cross.

Turning to Irene next, Cole said without hesitation, "It's my job to guide Elliana and help her adapt to the role of the matriarch. All you need to do is take care of the transition. Wouldn't you agree?"

He didn't say the words outright, but the meaning was crystal clear-stay out of it.

With a stiff smile, Irene replied, "You're right. I guess I got a little ahead of myself."

As the chosen successor and eldest grandson, Cole held the upper hand. Every time Irene tried to push back, she ended up biting her tongue, seething beneath a composed face.

Nobody in that room thought Cole would stand up for Elliana, especially not with that kind of force. The shock was enough to shut everyone up.

After watching Cole silence the entire table with a handful of sharp remarks, Elliana finally broke her silence. Her voice was calm as she said, "Irene has a point. As the family's matriarch, I should take charge. I'll handle the online mess myself."

Irene smirked derisively while others exchanged scornful looks. Everyone had the same thought-Elliana was overtly confident and completely clueless about the challenge. They were just waiting for her to fail.