

Zillionaire 1041

Chapter 1041:

Before the silence could stretch any further, Alicia slid over, looping her arm through Myla's and offering a bright smile to break the tension. "Myla, we'd better get moving. Traffic might be heavy, and it'll take a while to reach the restaurant."

Myla quickly pulled herself together, masking her disappointment behind a calm exterior. "You're right. Let's go."

The group made their way toward the waiting cars without another word.

Jeffery spoke up, breaking the quiet. "Dad, Mom, you two should ride up front."

Myla hesitated, glancing at Linsey, but the memory of Linsey's guarded reaction made her reconsider pressing any closer.

There would be other chances to close the gap—she knew that if she forced things now, she would only push Linsey further away.

So, Linsey and Alicia made their way to the second car, leaving the others to the first.

Jeffery slipped quietly into the front seat, making sure the more spacious area in back was left open for both women.

Pregnancy made even the simplest things tricky for Alicia, and she hesitated at the car door.

Linsey, noticing her struggle, reached out to offer a steadying hand.

"Thanks," Alicia said, her voice low but sincere.

With everyone settled, the car eased away from the curb, moving unhurriedly down the street.

Linsey soon realized the driver was deliberately careful, no doubt keeping Alicia's condition in mind.

The stillness inside the car didn't last long. Alicia soon glanced over, her tone gentle. "Linsey, did you manage to eat something this morning? Are you feeling hungry?"

Linsey shook her head lightly. "I'm fine. I ate before we left."

Alicia's hand drifted to her belly, her smile a mix of pride and shyness. "I did eat before I left the house, but I'm already hungry again. Cravings hit at the strangest times these days."

Drawing from her own experience, Linsey easily picked up the conversation with Alicia. "That's completely normal. Pregnancy has a way of making you hungry all the time. You need plenty of extra nourishment now."

Alicia agreed with an awkward smile, but a hint of worry crept into her eyes. "Honestly, ever since I got pregnant, all I want to do is eat and sleep. I barely get any exercise anymore."

Linsey offered her a comforting smile. "Don't stress about that. Once the baby arrives and you've had time to recover, you'll be back to your usual routines. For now, since you're well along, gentle walks are probably best."

From the front seat, Jeffery watched them in the rearview mirror, lost in thought.

Memories from four years ago resurfaced. Linsey had packed up and left Grester right after learning she was pregnant.

She had spent those years overseas, bringing twins into the world all on her own. Jeffery couldn't begin to fathom how she managed to get through it.

Chapter 1042:

Since Alicia's pregnancy began, Jeffery had witnessed firsthand just how hard carrying a child could be.

As her husband, he tried to make things easier for Alicia's pregnancy every day.

That was why Jeffery couldn't begin to fathom how Linsey had managed to bring up two kids on her own for four years.

The longer Jeffery dwelled on it, the more his frustration grew. A part of him wanted nothing more than to make Collin answer for the pain he had caused Linsey.

He couldn't wrap his head around how Linsey could forgive Collin and let him back into her life.

For a brief moment, Jeffery caught himself in a tangle of regret and irony.

Now, he and his parents were trying hard to seek Linsey's forgiveness. Even though he and Linsey shared the same blood, Jeffery couldn't shake the feeling that he had never actually been there for her.

Collin, for all his flaws, had at least shown Linsey genuine care. Compared to that, Jeffery felt that he and his family had only let her down, and he knew they had no grounds to expect Linsey to be kind to them now.

Meanwhile, a gentle, easy conversation continued in the back seat between Linsey and Alicia.

Alicia never brought up Linsey's place in the Lawson family or the turmoil from four years earlier. Instead, she focused on the present, chatting with Linsey about pregnancy and asking for advice with genuine warmth.

Linsey didn't hold back, readily sharing tips and bits of wisdom from her own experiences.

Curiosity twinkled in Alicia's eyes as she asked, "When did you find out you were having twins, Linsey? Was it difficult carrying both of them?"

Jeffery, quiet in the front, glanced at Linsey in the mirror, wanting to hear her answer too.

"I found out at a checkup around four or five months in," Linsey replied truthfully.

She hesitated for a moment before answering Alicia's question. "It's definitely harder carrying twins than just one. That's for sure..." That was all she offered, but she turned to give Alicia a reassuring smile. "Don't worry too much. The doctors will make sure you're as comfortable as possible."

Alicia took comfort in Linsey's words and didn't push for more.

Considering they weren't especially close, Alicia understood why Linsey chose not to share too much about the struggles she had faced. A soft smile appeared on Alicia's face as she rested her hand over her bump. "I just want the delivery to go smoothly so I can finally hold my baby in my arms."

Jeffery spoke with quiet conviction, his voice carrying the weight of genuine care. "You will be fine too."

Chapter 1043:

The reassurance drew a soft laugh from Alicia. "Of course we will, both the baby and I."

Linsey stood quietly to the side, listening carefully to their exchange. She could clearly observe the restrained worry and deep tenderness written across Jeffery's expression as he spoke to his wife.

What she witnessed felt like an undeniably authentic reflection of the profound bond these two people shared.

Jeffery wasn't the type of man who dealt in false emotions, nor did he seem like someone who would waste energy on empty pretense.

If he possessed the ability to fake such heartfelt affection toward his wife, he might as well have pursued a successful career as a well-established actor.

Linsey's thoughts inevitably drifted back to the conversation she had had with Joanne.

She cast a sideways glance at Alicia, whose face remained illuminated with that gentle, contented smile.

Could there really be any truth to those claims about Alicia demanding that substantial sum of money from the Lawson family? Or perhaps it was simply that Jeffery understood Alicia's eagerness for wealth but chose to love her unconditionally regardless?

If that were actually the case, Linsey wouldn't find anything particularly wrong with such an arrangement.

Alicia clearly loved money, and Jeffery possessed plenty of it. In many ways, they seemed like a perfectly complementary match.

But whether those persistent rumors held any truth or not, the genuine sincerity of their feelings for each other appeared to be what truly mattered in the end.

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Meanwhile, after saying goodbye to Linsey, Dolores made her way to the jewelry store she had discovered online.

Throughout Grester, this particular shop had become a cherished spot where couples crafted personalized pieces together, and where jewelry enthusiasts could create simple treasures using the store's provided materials.

Dolores approached the front counter, ready to inquire about their DIY workshop options.

A familiar voice suddenly cut through the ambient chatter from across the store.

"Dustin, Hester, this necklace is absolutely stunning. What are your thoughts?"

Dolores went rigid. That voice belonged to Joanne.

Her head turned slowly, almost against her will, until she spotted three figures clustered around a display case on the store's far side. The tall man positioned on the right made her breath catch. She would recognize that silhouette anywhere, even from behind.

"It's lovely and suits you perfectly. If it catches your fancy, we'll take it," Hester replied, her tone warm with approval. "You can wear this for Dustin's birthday celebration and attend the banquet as his date."

Hester's gaze shifted meaningfully toward her son as she spoke. "Don't you agree, Dustin?"

Chapter 1044:

When he responded, his voice carried that unmistakable resonance Dolores knew by heart. "It's fine."

The words hit Dolores like a physical blow. Reality crashed over her in merciless waves.

Her boyfriend stood there with his mother, selecting jewelry for another woman to wear.

They were choosing a gift specifically intended for Joanne to wear as Dustin's companion at his birthday celebration.

The full picture crystallized with brutal clarity.

So Dustin had already made arrangements for his birthday, while she had been naively planning an entire day of romantic activities for just the two of them.

Dolores's thoughts spiraled into chaos, but her survival instincts kicked in first. She needed to escape this place immediately.

Just as she pivoted toward the exit, her name sliced through the air.

“Ms. Davidson?” Joanne’s timing proved devastatingly perfect, trapping Dolores mid-flight. “Hester, Dustin, surely I’m not mistaken? Isn’t that Ms. Davidson, the CEO of Davidson Group?”

The sharp staccato of Joanne’s heels against the polished floor sent prickles of dread across Dolores’s scalp.

“Ms. Davidson, what a wonderful surprise!” Joanne’s voice practically sparkled with manufactured enthusiasm.

Trapped, Dolores drew a steadying breath and turned to face her tormentors. When her eyes met Dustin’s, she found his gaze clouded with unreadable emotions—dark and conflicted.

Recognition flickered across Hester’s features, followed immediately by barely concealed irritation.

Yet with Joanne watching expectantly, Hester smoothly adopted an expression of polite unfamiliarity.

“Oh?” Hester curled her lips into a faint smile. “Joanne, how do you know Ms. Davidson?”

The moment those words reached her ears, Dolores felt a sharp pang in her chest.

How did Joanne know her?

Everything started the day she turned to Dustin for help when Linsey and Collin went missing. Ever since then, she and Dustin had been meeting in secret whenever they could.

After each meeting, Dustin would head to a specific location to meet Joanne, carefully creating the impression that he had been with her all day.

Joanne was well aware of what was happening between her and Dustin. Hester didn’t like her, though.

If Hester ever uncovered the truth—that she and Dustin had been meeting all this time—then...

Chapter 1045:

“Well,” Joanne released a soft, deliberately vague sigh. “It happened just a few days ago. Dustin was present that day as well.”

Out of Hester’s sight, Dustin’s body went visibly rigid.

Even Dolores, positioned several steps away, could feel the waves of nervous energy radiating from him.

She had never witnessed this vulnerable side of him before.

Confusion suddenly washed over Dolores.

Was Dustin really this terrified? Could he truly be so frightened of his mother discovering that they had never completely cut ties?

She recalled how, just a short while earlier, Dustin had boldly suggested they should escape together.

Back then, she had sensibly refused his proposal.

Now, though, regret gnawed at her heart.

Seeing Dustin stand so intimately close to another woman sent waves of agony through her chest.

What hurt more was watching Dustin make absolutely no attempt to create distance between himself and Joanne.

He had sworn to her that he would find a way for them to be together. Yet here he stood, escorting Joanne through a jewelry store, attentively helping her select an expensive necklace.

Joanne's carefully chosen words immediately aroused Hester's suspicion.

Hester's expression turned glacial as she addressed Dustin, her voice dripping with arctic coldness. "And where precisely did you and Joanne encounter Ms. Davidson?"

Dustin's mouth twitched slightly at the corner. Avoiding Dolores' gaze entirely, he responded with forced casualness, "Grester isn't exactly a sprawling metropolis. Running into familiar faces happens all the time, doesn't it?"

Then he cast a casual glance toward Hester. "Joanne has been acquainted with Linsey for quite some time now. It's hardly shocking that she'd know Dolores as well."

Dustin understood perfectly that Hester had intentionally hidden his connection to Dolores in front of Joanne.

Since Hester wanted to maintain this charade, he figured he might as well cooperate.

He knew Hester would never risk discussing his romantic entanglements with Joanne listening.

The last thing Hester wanted was for Joanne—her handpicked choice for the perfect daughter-in-law—to decide against marrying into the Wade family.

If such a disaster occurred, all of Hester's careful scheming and investment would crumble to nothing.

Chapter 1046:

Hearing Dustin so coldly detach himself from her, Dolores discovered something unexpected. The crushing heartbreak she had braced herself for never came.

Instead, a bone-deep weariness settled over her.

She could grasp that Dustin was simply trying to sidestep complications.

Joanne let a subtle smile grace her lips, choosing not to expose Dustin's deception just yet.

Linsey hadn't agreed to work with her so far.

She was prepared to grant Linsey additional time to think it over.

Even so, she planned to do something to make her agree sooner.

"Dustin's absolutely correct. A few days ago, Dustin and I caught a movie together, and I spotted Linsey in the theater. I walked over to greet her, and that's when I was introduced to Ms. Davidson." Joanne delivered this explanation with a radiant smile aimed directly at Hester.

"I see," Hester responded at last, her wariness gradually dissolving. Joanne's manner and words rang so genuine that Hester couldn't question their authenticity.

Dolores and Dustin both knew that Joanne was lying.

Still, they desperately needed Joanne's help to keep the secret. Anxiety twisted in Dolores' stomach as she watched Joanne's effortless deception, yet beneath that unease, she couldn't deny the secret relief and gratitude flooding through her.

This contradiction struck Dolores as completely ridiculous and absurd. How had her relationship with Dustin twisted into something so complicated?

Turning back to Dolores, Joanne asked with that practiced smile, "Ms. Davidson, shopping for jewelry as well?"

The store clerk positioned near Dolores offered a courteous smile, clearly believing these customers knew each other. Without pause, she jumped in to explain Dolores' situation to Joanne. "This customer just walked in and hasn't begun browsing yet."

Dolores was relieved. Thank goodness she hadn't revealed her true purpose to the clerk. Had she done so, an incredibly uncomfortable scene would be unfolding right now.

Dolores managed to curve her lips upward at precisely the right moment, though warmth never touched her eyes. "Simply taking a leisurely walk."

Excitement colored Joanne's voice. "What perfect timing! Could you spare a moment to help me decide which necklaces flatter me?"

When she heard this request, Dolores' composure slipped, and her first instinct was to decline.

Hester, typically cold toward Dolores, suddenly broke into an enthusiastic grin. "What an excellent idea."

Chapter 1047:

Dolores thought that she had misheard something.

Concern creased Dustin's brow as an ominous feeling settled over him. Fixing Dolores with a subtle smile, Hester spoke with deliberate precision. "Your dear friend Linsey has quite the reputation as a fashion designer. Being so close to someone with such refined taste, you must possess excellent judgment yourself. Perfect for helping Joanne select jewelry."

She then shifted to another topic. "Dustin's birthday approaches, and we're planning an elegant dinner party. Joanne will accompany him as his date and must look absolutely stunning."

This news wasn't new to Dolores, yet hearing it repeated did nothing to lessen the ache piercing her heart.

Before she could voice any refusal, Joanne stepped forward with apparent intimacy, linking their arms and guiding her toward a display counter.

“Dolores, how does this necklace look to you?” After posing the question, Joanne seemed to recall something and retrieved her phone, displaying a photo for Dolores. “Here’s the evening gown I’ll be wearing that night. Do you think this necklace complements the dress?”

A faint ringing began in Dolores’ ears, coming in waves and making Joanne’s voice sound distant and unclear.

Her attention fixed on the phone screen in Joanne’s hand.

The extravagant evening gown gleamed with opulence, each detail radiating costly refinement.

That lustrous silk fabric seemed to mock Dolores, its shine cutting into her vision like a blade.

The stunning gown itself didn’t spark jealousy in Dolores; what she truly envied was how effortlessly Joanne had won Hester’s favor. With a proper family background, her own relationship with Dustin wouldn’t be such an uphill battle.

“I’m really not skilled at evaluating jewelry.” Dolores’ voice came out rough and strained as she tried desperately to decline the request.

Joanne’s eyebrows lifted, followed by a look of genuine disappointment. “You’re not? That’s strange. Someone who is acquainted with Linsey should naturally possess exceptional taste as well...”

A quick hand flew to Joanne’s mouth as she feigned regret. “Oh, I’m so sorry, Dolores. I didn’t mean it that way.”

Hester cut in, “Joanne, you didn’t say anything wrong.”

She then let out a disdainful snort as she turned her attention to Dolores. "With Linsey, someone so talented, by your side, how could you not have absorbed anything from her? The problem clearly lies with you, Ms. Davidson."

"Mom!" Dustin's face turned stormy as he chimed in.

Those same sharp remarks had pierced his ears countless times before. Never again would he allow Dolores to endure such cruel belittlement. His gaze locked onto Joanne, warning flashing in his eyes.

Chapter 1048:

Joanne had obviously steered the conversation toward Linsey on purpose.

Unfortunately, Joanne had voiced exactly what Hester was thinking. Hester, who had been ready to tear into Dustin, froze when she saw the ice in his stare.

The words stuck in her throat.

Meanwhile, Joanne caught Dustin's shift in mood but didn't flinch. Pretending oblivion, she turned back to Dolores and clasped her hand tenderly. "Dolores, pay us no mind. Hester and I were simply teasing you."

Her smile turned warm as she continued, "Linsey truly is remarkable at what she does. Hester and I both respect her immensely and have been dying to hire her for our own projects."

Dolores remained quiet, lost for words.

Hester's dislike for her wasn't exactly news to Dolores.

The woman looked down on her for being an orphan and for depending on Dustin's investment to rescue her failing company.

She had always assumed Hester only had eyes for Joanne.

Turns out Linsey had also earned a spot on Hester's list of admired individuals.

Dolores' lips pressed together slightly. Drawing a steady breath, she replied with conviction, "Linsey is my best friend, and I couldn't be prouder of her. But I'm not lacking either. I'm perfectly satisfied with where I stand."

Smoothly pulling her hand free from Joanne's grip, Dolores continued, "If you want Linsey to design something for you, reach out to her directly. There's no need to speak to me in such a roundabout manner."

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Joanne's face went rigid, surprise flickering across her features. She had expected that differences in talent would naturally spark jealousy between friends.

Yet Dolores seemed completely free of envy toward Linsey.

A twinge of disappointment crept into Joanne's chest.

Hester, however, bristled at Dolores's sharp response. Unable to contain herself, she sneered, "Ms. Davidson, are you perhaps referring to the Davidson Group?"

A mocking laugh escaped her lips before she pressed on, "I won't even mention what happened four years ago. But I heard your company's recent victory at the design competition was also thanks to Linsey..."

Dolores knew exactly where Hester was heading with this. Meeting the woman's gaze without flinching, she shot back, "Linsey has her strengths, and I have mine. No need to elevate Linsey just to tear me down."

After a moment's pause, something seemed to occur to Dolores. Feigning innocent curiosity, she asked, "Mrs. Wade, didn't you reach your current position by inheriting the Wade Group? So why do you look down on me for building the Davidson Group from scratch?"

The words hit their mark. Hester's face turned livid instantly. Both Dustin and Joanne stared in obvious shock.

Chapter 1049:

Anyone familiar with Hester knew her relationship with Dustin's father was anything but peaceful. She had always loathed being called Mrs. Wade. Without Dustin's upcoming inheritance of the Wade Group, Hester would have cut all connections to the Wade family without a second thought. Dolores's chosen form of address had struck exactly the wrong chord with Hester.

Dustin felt the rising tension and intervened before his mother could explode. "Just call her Hester," he said quickly.

Displeasure clouded Hester's features. "That won't be necessary." She regarded Dolores, her voice turning sharp. "Ms. Davidson, if you're unwilling to help Joanne select a necklace, we'll manage without you. We're unlikely to cross paths again anyway."

Something dim flickered through Dustin's gaze at her words.

That morning, Collin's invitation had arrived at his doorstep. Originally, he had no intention of joining his mother and Joanne for their shopping trip. Yet something inexplicable had driven him to use the outing as his excuse to decline Collin's offer.

Running into Dolores here was the last thing he had expected. Collin had mentioned that Linsey would spend the day with Dolores, with him watching over both children. Lately, Linsey and Dolores had become practically inseparable. So where was Linsey now? What had drawn Dolores out on her own? Linsey neither needed to watch the kids nor attend to Gorman at the hospital. Shouldn't she be with Dolores?

Had Linsey been here, Dolores wouldn't have faced Hester and Joanne alone.

The more Dustin dwelled on the situation, the deeper his frustration grew. Without realizing it, his irritation toward Linsey intensified with each passing thought.

“Mom, that’s enough,” Dustin said, his brow creasing with displeasure. Dolores met his gaze with cool indifference.

Moments before she stepped into the jewelry store, excitement coursed through her veins as she planned ways to make Dustin’s birthday truly memorable. How foolish she had been to hope again. Dustin never intended to celebrate his birthday with her. Instead, he would host a grand birthday banquet with Joanne at his side as his chosen companion.

While Joanne and Hester subjected her to open mockery and subtle barbs, Dustin merely watched in silence. His few lukewarm comments held no real intention of defending her honor. The thought of his mother discovering their continued contact terrified him too much to find the courage he should have shown in protecting her.

“Dustin.”

The sound of her own voice calling his name reached Dolores’ ears. In the next heartbeat, Dustin’s brows drew together as shock flickered across his features, his eyes silently demanding an explanation from her. Would she really expose everything between them now?

Hester fixed Dolores with a sharp, warning look. “Dolores, what exactly do you think you’re going to say?”

Joanne, who had been relishing the spectacle with obvious entertainment, suddenly felt her expression grow cold.

Dolores remained oblivious to the changing expressions around her. She kept her gaze locked on Dustin, her voice cutting through the tension like ice. “Dustin, I’ve grown weary of all this secrecy over the past few days. I refuse to continue skulking in shadows. We’re done.”

That was when Dustin finally managed to collect his fractured thoughts. His eyes went wide with disbelief as he took an instinctive step toward her. "Dolores, what are you talking about?"

Chapter 1050:

Hester's grip tightened on Dustin's arm like a vice. "Dustin!" Her voice quavered with barely contained rage.

Joanne herself seemed momentarily thrown by this sudden development. This couldn't be happening. Why would Dolores simply surrender like this? Dolores was her only weapon against Linsey!

Joanne clenched her teeth quietly, then forced a smile. "Ms. Davidson, are you alright? Just calm down. Let's talk this through."

She tried to ease Dolores' mood, her voice calm and steady. "You must be joking, right?"

Dolores' breath hitched slightly, but she only watched Joanne coldly, as if watching someone perform alone on stage.

Joanne suddenly said, "Oh, that's right. Linsey and Collin, the founders of CR Corporation, they're a couple. Naturally, you and Dustin must have known each other for quite a while. I shouldn't have believed you two only met a few days ago."

She gave a soft laugh, stepped closer, and gently took Dolores' hand. Dolores narrowed her eyes, catching the emotion in Joanne's gaze. Something wasn't adding up.

Was Joanne trying to cover up what she and Dustin had been doing? Dolores couldn't understand why Joanne was suddenly trying to help her.

Just moments ago, she had been sneering at her alongside Hester. Then she remembered something Linsey had said—Joanne had feelings for Jeffery.

“If you’re not feeling well, Ms. Davidson, you should head home and get some rest. We can talk later,” Joanne said gently, cutting her off before she could speak.

Dolores said nothing, her gaze slowly dropping. She had never liked Joanne. And now, she was finally seeing her true face.

Whatever Joanne was scheming, Dolores wasn’t going to let her win. If Joanne wanted a fight, she would get one.

Dolores suddenly spoke, her voice light but layered. “Thank you for your concern, Ms. Ellis. I am feeling a little tired. And hungry, too.”

Joanne hesitated, about to speak, but Dolores beat her to it, a faint smile on her lips. “If I’d known I’d end up like this, I would’ve just joined the Lawsons for breakfast with Linsey this morning. At least I wouldn’t feel so dizzy now—or be rambling nonsense.”

Her smile deepened as she continued, “I didn’t want to intrude on their family time. What do you think, Ms. Ellis? Should I have accepted Jeffery’s invitation?”

She raised her voice on the last line, speaking each word with sharp clarity—making sure Joanne heard every bit of it. “Jeffery seems more refined now that he’s—

Married. He and his wife make a perfect pair. If I get another chance, I’ll be sure to sit down and have a proper chat with them.”

Joanne froze. She looked completely thrown off.

Dolores gave her a soft pat on the shoulder. “What do you think?”

Joanne’s heart cracked. Her hands trembled, her face pale. She stared at Dolores in shock. Now she understood exactly what Dolores was getting at.

To Dustin and his mother, Dolores' mention of Jeffery might seem random. But Joanne knew better.

The cold mockery in Dolores' eyes was unmistakable. Every word had been deliberate.