

Zillionaire 1051

Chapter 1051:

Joanne wanted to stay calm, to brush it off—but her breath faltered, and pain gripped her chest.

She opened her mouth, trying to answer, but no words came out. Her lips quivered in silence.

Dolores might never win Hester's approval, but Dustin's love for her remained unwavering. What about her, though? Bitterness crept into Joanne's thoughts. Not only had Jeffery forgotten her completely, but he had also married another woman and started a family.

Dizziness and despair crashed over Joanne like a tidal wave. Time was running out. Once Alicia delivered Jeffery's child, her last chance at winning him back would slip away forever.

Summoning a forced smile, Joanne spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Dolores, since you have other matters to attend to, I won't keep you any longer."

Dolores watched in amazement as Joanne composed herself with remarkable speed. Within moments, Joanne had turned to face Dustin and Hester, her expression already softening into a gentle, practiced smile.

"Hester, Dustin, shall we browse somewhere else?"

Moving toward them with casual grace, Joanne approached the pair.

"What were you and Dolores discussing just now, Joanne?" Hester's question came suddenly. Something about their conversation had caught her attention. She was certain she had heard them mention the Lawson family.

Without missing a beat, Joanne replied smoothly, "Dolores mentioned the Lawson family invited her and Linsey to breakfast this morning, though she declined. Probably just a social gathering. I wouldn't know the specifics."

Before Hester could probe further, Joanne quickly reached out and linked her arm through Dustin's, leaning into him with feigned affection.

"Dustin, why don't we look at some high heels first? Once we've chosen the shoes, selecting a necklace might be easier."

Deep furrows appeared across Dustin's brow. Instinctively, he tried pulling his arm free from Joanne's grip.

Just then, Joanne turned back and called out, "Oh, by the way, Dolores."

Those words stopped Dustin cold in his tracks.

Reality hit him hard. He couldn't afford to displease Joanne right now. If Joanne exposed his recent secret contact with Dolores, Hester would intervene immediately. Worse yet, his mother might actively sabotage Dolores at every turn.

Dolores had poured her heart and soul into rebuilding the Davidson Group. Dustin refused to let his mother destroy everything she had accomplished.

Hester had strategically placed Joanne in his life as a watchdog. Just as easily, she could introduce another woman to drive a wedge between him and Dolores.

Tolerating Joanne seemed safer than risking someone who genuinely craved marriage into the Wade family.

Heart pounding frantically, Dustin listened as Joanne addressed Dolores. "Dustin's birthday banquet is coming up in a few days. You're welcome to attend if you're available. I'll arrange for invitations to be sent to both you and Linsey."

Dolores remained perfectly still, offering no response whatsoever. No one could see that her heart had just shattered into countless fragments.

So this was how far Joanne's influence had spread within the Wade family. She now held the power to control their guest lists.

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The quiet realization dawned on Dolores that both Dustin and Hester must have willingly granted Joanne such authority.

Hester would likely announce Joanne as Dustin's fiancée at the upcoming banquet.

That coveted title, once the subject of her deepest dreams, now seemed forever beyond her reach.

A bitter smile tugged at Dolores' lips. She no longer possessed the strength to plan any surprises for Dustin.

Exhaustion had claimed her completely.

Hester had been ready to interrogate Joanne further about her conversation with Dolores. But seeing Dustin and Joanne standing so intimately together, arms intertwined, made her abandon all other concerns in that instant.

Hester had bent over backward to guarantee Dustin would end up with a daughter-in-law she personally approved of. Whether Dustin and Joanne felt anything real for each other never entered into her calculations.

As they exited the jewelry shop, Hester cast a sidelong glance at Joanne, her expression impossible to read. "Joanne, you're actually going to invite Dolores and Linsey to Dustin's birthday party?"

In Hester's mind, Joanne had no clue about any lingering ties between Dolores and Dustin. She genuinely believed the invitation made perfect sense.

Letting Dolores witness Dustin's growing bond with Joanne firsthand might convince her to step aside, perhaps even sooner than expected. Hester doubted Dolores had any deep attachment to Dustin, and she couldn't imagine Dustin being unable to move on without Dolores. To her, it was all just youthful infatuation—nothing more than a temporary spark.

Did those two really believe they were destined soulmates?

Joanne offered a gentle smile. "Absolutely. We're all friends—it would be strange not to include them."

After a thoughtful moment, Joanne turned to Dustin and continued, "Besides, Collin has been Dustin's closest friend for decades. Linsey's his wife, so it only makes sense they'll both be there."

Dustin's stoic demeanor faltered ever so slightly, but he kept his thoughts to himself.

Not missing a beat, Joanne watched him carefully, catching the subtle shift in his expression.

Right then, an odd suspicion began to form in her mind.

Maybe she had been going about this the wrong way from the beginning. Rather than trying to separate Linsey and Dolores, should her efforts have been directed at Dustin all along?

That notion, absurd at first, sent a glimmer of hope flickering through Joanne's otherwise clouded gaze.

A quiet laugh slipped out as she muttered under her breath, "So that's how it is."

A long silence stretched before Dustin finally spoke, his voice low and brooding. "Do whatever you think is best."

Hosting a birthday party had never been his idea—he would have skipped it if he could. Dolores still filled every corner of his thoughts, pushing everything else aside.

Chapter 1053:

The sting of her sharp words earlier that day lingered, leaving him restless and off balance. But with his birthday drawing near, Hester would only tighten her grip, watching his every move more closely than ever.

For now, Dustin knew he would have to bide his time, hoping another chance to talk to Dolores would come soon.

Across town, Linsey and the Lawsons made their way into the restaurant they'd booked. Only after their orders were taken and the waiter stepped out did the family finally get a quiet moment with Linsey.

Myla, trying to find her footing, offered a smile that was both warm and tinged with apology. "Linsey, have you only just come back?"

Linsey didn't meet her gaze, answering in an even, distant voice. "I came back three months ago."

The reply made Myla falter, her smile slipping. The urge to ask why Linsey hadn't reached out in all that time sat heavily on her tongue.

Sensing Myla's question before she could speak, Jeffery stepped in smoothly. "It must feel strange to be back in Grester after all these years. Are things going alright for you?"

Linsey gave a small nod, her response calm and sincere. "Everything's been going well. Thank you."

While Linsey and Jeffery exchanged words, Cruz gently squeezed Myla's hand beneath the table, a silent effort to calm her nerves.

Before they left home, they had already discussed their plan.

Myla and Cruz carried the weight of regret for how things had played out four years before. To avoid making the same mistakes, they agreed to move slowly and let Linsey come to them at her own pace. Any pressure or old missteps now would only push Linsey further out of reach.

A shaky breath escaped from Myla as she worked to calm her nerves. With her lips pressed tight, she looked at Linsey and asked, her concern obvious, "What has it been like for you, living all this time overseas by yourself?"

Worry shone in her eyes as she took in every detail of Linsey's appearance. Her voice came out unsteady. "You look so much thinner than when I last saw you. Are you really looking after yourself?"

The warmth behind Myla's questions made it impossible for Linsey to keep her distance any longer.

After a moment, Linsey glanced over at Myla's teary eyes and answered in a gentle tone, "I'm all right, really. I've just shed a few pounds, nothing more. Four years is a long time—nobody stays exactly the same."

It was four years earlier when she first realized she was pregnant, and back then, her days with Collin had been filled with joy. During that period, happiness and contentment seemed to follow her everywhere. Her face glowed, and she put on some weight.

The world shifted, though, the moment she learned that Collin had been lying to her. That heartbreak nearly crushed her, yet she forced herself to eat and sleep for the sake of the children she was carrying.

Once she left Grester, she found herself managing everything on her own. Delivering twins took a toll, leaving her body depleted. Hard work and long days made it almost inevitable that she would lose weight.

Things only started to change after she came back to Grester and made peace with Collin. Gradually, her body regained its strength, and she looked more like her old self.

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By now, Linsey figured there shouldn't be much difference between how she looked now and four years ago.

Maybe Myla was only trying to fill the silence, not really expressing any deep concern.

A sudden laugh from Jeffery broke the tension between them. "I have to say, you carry yourself with a lot more grace these days. You're nothing like the woman I remember from four years back."

The words made Linsey smile, and she retorted with a grin, "Whatever changes you see in me, they're nothing compared to how much you've changed."

With a sly smile, she turned to Alicia. "If you only knew what a handful he was back then," said Linsey, her mock seriousness barely hiding her amusement.

Though her words were lighthearted, the teasing stirred something deep in Jeffery, pulling old regrets to the surface. Images from the past flickered in his mind—he remembered falling for Carol's lies, acting without all the facts, and hurting Linsey more than he cared to admit.

A shadow passed over his features as the memories took hold. For a moment, nobody spoke.

Jeffery finally broke the silence, his voice quiet but earnest as he said, "Linsey, I owe you an apology."

Instantly, the mood in the room shifted, tension creeping into the air. Gone was Linsey's easy smile. She offered Jeffery a measured look, her face composed yet distant. She chose to look away, leaving her silence hanging between them.

Alicia blinked in surprise, uncertain how to react to the sudden change. In all her time around Jeffery, Alicia couldn't recall ever hearing him admit fault, let alone so openly.

He usually presented himself as the picture of grace and politeness, but Alicia had always detected a faint trace of pride that seemed to follow him everywhere.

Hearing him apologize so sincerely to Linsey seemed almost impossible to believe.

Questions began swirling in Alicia's mind, curiosity sparked by the obvious history between them.

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Alicia didn't have the full picture, but there was enough for her to figure that the Lawsons had once hurt Linsey in a way that left a mark. Now it looked like they were trying to make things right.

The air was starting to shift. Alicia caught on to it.

After a short pause, she rose from her seat. Without saying a word, she reached over and picked up a bottle of wine from the table, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Everyone snapped back to reality at Alicia's sudden action. Jeffery's eyes widened as he watched her deftly twist off the bottle cap. Certain she was about to take a drink, he lunged forward to grab the bottle from her hands. "Alicia, what are you doing?"

Alicia dodged with surprising quickness. "Sit down and don't move."

Myla and Cruz exchanged alarmed glances. "Alicia, we have juice right here! You can't possibly forget you're carrying a baby—alcohol is absolutely off limits," Myla said.

"She's right. If you're having wine cravings, we can ask the server to bring some alcohol-free wine specially made for expectant mothers," Cruz added.

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Even as they protested, Alicia had already poured a generous glass of the deep red wine.

As she saw her fingers curl around the stem, Linsey's hand shot out to circle her wrist. "This particular wine has a high alcohol content, and you're well into your second trimester. It could be dangerous."

Alicia's gaze swept over their worried expressions before she broke into delighted laughter.

Without warning, she slid the glass directly in front of Jeffery and declared, "Naturally, I won't be drinking this. Jeffery will."

Her hand landed firmly on Jeffery's shoulder as her tone turned deadly serious. "Real apologies require more than pretty words. True remorse demands action. If earning forgiveness were so simple, every person would assume they could wound others and walk away unscathed."

Alicia let the silence stretch meaningfully before adding, "Though naturally, a single drink won't suffice. How can we trust you won't return to mistreating Linsey the moment our backs are turned?"

Jeffery had been ready to agree without hesitation, but her final words gave him pause.

Drawing himself up to his full height, he proclaimed with fierce conviction, "I swear on my honor—from this day forward, I, Jeffery Lawson, will never lay a finger on Linsey again!"

"Prove it. Drink this first!" Alicia commanded, her voice brooking no argument.

Jeffery seized the glass without a moment's hesitation and threw back the burning liquid in one decisive gulp.

Within seconds, crimson heat bloomed across his cheeks.

"Excellent! Here's another!" Alicia announced, already refilling his glass to the brim. "Keep drinking and keep promising. That's how we'll know you mean every word."

Jeffery never wavered, draining the second glass just as quickly as the first.

Linsey watched the entire spectacle with her mouth hanging open in disbelief.

“Jeffery, you...” Linsey tried to halt this increasingly surreal situation but didn’t know what to say.

At that precise moment, Jeffery brought his glass crashing down against the table with a resounding bang, his face transformed by unexpected gravity.

Their eyes met across the table, and though alcohol had clouded his gaze, every word emerged with crystal clarity. “Linsey...”

Having spoken her name, he faltered momentarily before adding in a voice thick with emotion, “My precious sister.”

Something twisted painfully in Linsey’s chest as conflicting emotions churned within her heart.

“I have no right to call myself your brother,” Jeffery whispered, his eyes sliding shut. “Everything I did was unforgivable.”

His head bowed under the weight of shame, regret etched into every line of his face. “You have Mom’s eyes, her delicate features. You even look like me in some ways. The instant I laid eyes on you, recognition should have struck like lightning. Instead, I was too consumed by my own arrogance to see the truth staring me in the face. That’s why all those terrible things happened, things that should never have been allowed to pass. Every mistake, every cruel word, every moment of blindness stems from my pride and willful ignorance!”

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Jeffery drew in a shuddering breath, his entire frame trembling with the force of his confession.

Tears gathered at the corners of his reddened eyes, threatening to spill over at any second.

Through gritted teeth, he forced out his final, desperate plea. “Linsey, if there’s any chance you could find it in your heart to forgive me, to forgive Mom and Dad for all we’ve put you through, I’ll sign over every last share I own in the Lawson Group. Everything will be yours!”

The moment Jeffery finished speaking, both Myla and Cruz turned toward him, their faces a mixture of surprise and complicated emotions.

Myla’s lips parted as if she wanted to chime in, but whatever words she considered never made it past her tongue.

Cruz breathed out softly, his sigh barely there, and in the end, he simply acquiesced to Jeffery’s choice.

Linsey, on the other hand, kept her cool. Nothing about her demeanor changed as she took in everyone’s reactions.

“You honestly think I’m after Lawson Group’s shares?” Her gaze slid over to Jeffery, her voice calm and unreadable.

A beat of hesitation crossed Jeffery’s face. He rushed to clarify. “Linsey, that’s not what I meant at all. I just—”

What he wanted was to show her, even after all his past mistakes, that he meant to make things right. The only thing he truly owned—his only real asset—was those shares in Lawson Group. That was all he could offer now.

He had no illusions that Linsey was greedy or ambitious. He just wanted to give her something that mattered.

Before he could get the rest out, Linsey interrupted him, a subtle smile appearing on her lips. Her words came slow and calm. “That’s enough. Where’s the share transfer agreement? If you’re serious, have your lawyer bring the paperwork. I’m not the type who gets moved by sweet talk alone.”

Jeffery hesitated for only a moment before pulling out his phone. "Draw up the agreement and head over right away," he instructed after dialing his lawyer.

Once the call ended, his attention shifted back to her, his tone earnest. "Linsey, I'm serious about this. If you'll accept my apology, I'll agree to anything you ask."

Without looking his way, Linsey traced a circle along her water glass. "You're just going to hand the shares over to me? Don't you think you ought to run this by Alicia before you do anything drastic?"

Linsey glanced over at Alicia, catching the faint surprise flickering in her eyes. She continued, "You and Alicia are married, after all. The shares you own in the Lawson Group belong to both of you."

A quiet laugh escaped Alicia as she replied with an—

Easy grace accompanied Alicia's words. "Jeffery's shares are his alone to give. There's really no need to check with me."

Jeffery's lips curved into a small smile as he met Alicia's gaze. "Our family has spent a fortune on my treatments all these years, and honestly, I haven't done much to move the company forward. I probably should have given up those shares long ago."

His smile turned warmer as he faced his sister. "You're a Lawson too, Linsey. The shares belong with you."

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Linsey's expression softened at his words. Her eyes drifted to Alicia's stomach, and her tone took on a matter-of-fact edge. "Don't forget about your child. Giving away company shares isn't something to take lightly."

Questions lingered at the back of her mind. She couldn't be sure if Alicia really meant what she said, especially after Joanne's recent accusations echoed in her thoughts. If Alicia really had demanded such a large sum from the Lawson family, why would she seem so composed after hearing Jeffery's offer?

Maybe Joanne had been trying to stir up trouble, twisting the truth to push Linsey toward that unreasonable agreement.

Alicia's smile returned, warm and easy, as Linsey spoke. She rested her hand gently on her belly, her voice full of quiet affection. "One day, our child will choose their own path, and Jeffery and I will be there to give them the kind of home where they can grow without pressure. Those shares don't matter. Our baby will have everything they need, with or without them."

After a brief pause, Alicia's lips curved into a relaxed smile. "Besides, Jeffery has already contacted the lawyer. We can't just let them come all this way for nothing, right?"

The private room door suddenly opened before Linsey could answer. A waiter stepped inside, followed by several servers bearing an impressive spread of exquisite dishes. Each plate found its place on the table.

Myla immediately sprang to her feet at the sight of food, carefully arranging the dishes she knew Linsey favored right in front of her.

"Linsey, you must be starving! Go ahead and dig in. You've always been crazy about this particular dish." Her voice bubbled with enthusiasm as she continued, "This happens to be their signature specialty. The whole reason I picked this restaurant, actually."

Without missing a beat, she pushed two more plates toward Alicia's side of the table. "Alicia, these are for you. Yesterday you were dying to taste this, remember? Better eat up before your stomach starts complaining."

Alicia's entire face brightened as she responded with genuine sweetness, "Thank you, Myla. Make sure you eat plenty too."

A few seconds ticked by before Linsey managed her courteous reply. "That's very thoughtful of you."

Had Myla focused all her attention solely on her, Linsey knew she would feel suffocated by the overwhelming care.

While Alicia's true intentions remained somewhat mysterious, her presence definitely helped balance the dynamic and ease the tension. Honestly, Linsey would much rather keep her distance from the Lawson family.

She genuinely couldn't fathom what drove their persistent attempts to forge some kind of connection with her.

Alicia suddenly leaned forward and captured Linsey's hand in both of hers, her voice dropping to an earnest whisper. "Linsey, those shares represent Jeffery's most sincere attempt at making amends. His desire to apologize comes straight from the heart."

Her gaze dropped as she continued, "I don't know the full story of what transpired between you all in the past, and I certainly have no right to demand forgiveness from you. At the end of the day, you should follow whatever path feels true to your heart."

Alicia's smile returned as her eyes moved from Jeffery to Myla, then to Cruz. "I have complete faith that Jeffery, along with Myla and Cruz, will honor whatever you decide."

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When Linsey raised her head, she found all three of them nodding with unmistakable conviction.

"Linsey, we fully support Jeffery's decision as well," Myla added eagerly.

The moment those words left her lips, inspiration seemed to strike her like lightning. Her eyes practically sparkled as she blurted out, "Linsey, what if I do this? I'll throw my shares into the mix too, right alongside Jeffery's!"

Linsey's mouth curved into the faintest hint of amusement, though her expression remained guarded. "With this level of enthusiasm from all of you, I'm starting to wonder if the Lawson Group is secretly on the verge of bankruptcy."

“Absolutely ridiculous!” Cruz, who had maintained his silence until this moment, suddenly erupted with fierce conviction. “Sure, the Lawson Group’s influence in Grester isn’t what it once was, but we remain one of the premier family enterprises in this city. Our roots run deep and strong. Bankruptcy? That’s completely out of the question.”

Cruz’s sudden outburst caught Myla completely off guard. She delivered a swift slap to his arm while hissing under her breath, “Will you please keep it down?”

They were supposed to be winning Linsey back, yet here he was defending the company’s reputation at the worst possible moment.

The reality of his blunder hit Cruz like a cold splash of water. His expression shifted instantly as he scrambled to soften his approach. “Linsey, please don’t take that the wrong way. I wasn’t trying to snap at you. I just wanted to set the record straight.”

Taking a steadying breath, he gathered his composure before continuing in a more measured tone. “Linsey, while the Lawson Group might not rival Collin’s CR Corporation in scope, I give you my word that we’ll do everything to support you.”

Jeffery immediately recognized the opening Cruz had created and seized it without hesitation. “Linsey, I understand your heart still belongs to Collin, but you can’t rely on men forever. You need something concrete in your own hands, something that’s truly yours to control.”

A playful glint appeared in Linsey’s eyes as she arched an eyebrow at Cruz. Her words were both sharp and lightly teasing. “So when you say men can’t be trusted, does that include you too?”

Without a hint of hesitation, she held Cruz’s gaze, not backing down for a second.

Traditionally, Linsey had always approached those much older than her with courtesy and care. Today, though, she wanted to see just how far the Lawson family’s patience would stretch.

Everyone knew Cruz was a man of few words, celebrated for his steadfast loyalty to Myla all these years.

Linsey, however, had never seen blind devotion as anything special.

In her eyes, marriage meant two people standing side by side, committed to each other. That kind of devotion wasn't a grand gesture. It was simply the bare minimum.

So when men were constantly praised for doing the least, it didn't sit right with her. She couldn't pretend it made sense.

And as far as she was concerned, Cruz—like Jeffery—walked around with a smugness that ran bone-deep. It clung to them, and she found it more irritating than impressive.

Jeffery, caught off guard by what Linsey had just said, stood frozen for a beat. He couldn't quite believe how bold she had become.

Growing up, even at their wildest, he and Carol had always shown a healthy fear of Cruz.

Chapter 1059:

He had a hard time imagining anyone but Linsey having the nerve to throw out a remark like that about Cruz.

"Linsey, Dad..." Jeffery said, ready to speak up for Cruz.

But before he could get another word out, Cruz cut in. "You're right," he said, his voice calm and clear, catching everyone off guard.

For a moment, no one moved. No one spoke. They were stunned that Cruz, of all people, had actually sided with Linsey.

Her comment had been a direct jab at his dependability.

Not many fathers would quietly endure such direct criticism from their own child.

Most assumed Cruz's earlier agreement was just a passing remark, nothing more. Yet, he surprised everyone by continuing, "Linsey, maybe I haven't earned the right to call myself your father. But in my heart, you have always been my daughter."

He paused, drawing in a slow breath. Years of regret softened the lines on his face. "Four years ago, when Myla and I first learned the truth about you and Carol, Myla fought with everything she had to bring you home. But me? I hardly tried at all. I just stood aside and let you slip away."

Linsey said nothing, her mind drifting to those days.

In the beginning, it was only Myla's familiar features that drew her in—an odd sense of recognition, but nothing deeper.

It wasn't until later that she found out Myla and Cruz were her birth parents, and even then, the only flicker of emotion she felt was toward Myla.

Cruz, on the other hand, had always been little more than a name she recognized. From the start, he had never been anything more than a distant figure, someone she happened to be biologically tied to. Even now, that fact changed nothing.

She had never once felt the kind of bond other daughters spoke about—the closeness she used to quietly long for.

So hearing Cruz speak to her so openly now caught her completely off guard. She hadn't seen it coming.

"And on top of everything else, the child we brought up ended up doing things to you that were beyond cruel." As Cruz mentioned Carol, a storm of guilt and anger twisted across his face. "It doesn't matter whether you're our daughter or not. What matters is, we should have never let Carol treat you like that."

His voice began to fray at the edges as he continued, “Linsey, the pain we’ve caused you runs deep. We know that. If you decide you can’t forgive us, if you choose to keep your distance from this family, we’ll respect it without question. Even so, we want to give you whatever we can. We just hope your path from here on out is steadier, without more heartache weighing it down.”

Quietly, Myla reached for a tissue, dabbing away the tears that clung stubbornly to her lashes.

Heavy guilt pressed down on Jeffery. “I won’t pretend I was blameless. Carol’s choices were unforgivable, but I played my part. My arrogance blinded me, and I let myself get fooled by someone who only meant harm.”

Linsey held his gaze in silence, fully aware that he was speaking about the way Alexa had once crafted her weakness like a weapon, using it to tug at his emotions and bend his judgment without him realizing it.

Her response was gentle but unwavering. “Alexa did have cancer. In her final days, even she was shocked by the cruelty Carol unleashed.”

Chapter 1060:

A soft sadness colored Linsey’s voice as she said, “Before she died, I believe Alexa truly carried the weight of the choices she made more than twenty years ago—and wished she had done things differently.”

When she heard this, Myla’s hands curled tightly, her emotions rising like a tide she could barely hold back.

It stung to realize that, if only she had been more observant, Linsey might not have carried so much pain alone for so long.

Instead, she had poured every ounce of love into raising her enemy’s child.

Had Alexa survived, she would have demanded her answers—face to face.

Linsey's voice stayed calm, almost chilly. "No amount of tragedy excuses what Alexa or Carol did. The damage remains. I can't just let that go."

She paused, her eyes steady. "Honestly, you're all the same to me. Maybe if we were lovers or close friends, I'd consider giving us another shot. But that's not our story. There's no special bond tying me to this family."

Unhurried, she reached for a piece of food, chewing slowly, her composure untouched by the weight of her own words.

Almost ruthless, yet she simply spoke the truth.

The truth was, there had never been any real bond between her and the Lawson family. All they had ever given her were wounds that never truly healed.

Given everything they had done, expecting her to offer forgiveness without hesitation was out of the question.

She wasn't the kind of person to overlook that kind of hurt just to keep the peace.

At Linsey's words, the light faded from Myla's eyes, her expression shadowed by disappointment.

Linsey's forgiveness was never going to come easy—Myla had known that from the start. Anyone in Linsey's shoes would find it hard to accept apologies that arrived so late in the game. She doubted she would forgive, either.

Linsey set her utensils down with deliberate care, her face remaining unreadable. "If you've truly decided, then I have no reason to refuse the shares."

Excitement broke out instantly, lighting up every face at the table.

“Did you just say yes?” Jeffery nearly jumped from his seat, unable to hide his shock.

Emotion shimmered in Myla’s eyes, her voice trembling. “Are you sure, Linsey?”

Cruz let out a deep breath, relief showing in his features. “This is the right choice, Linsey. Truly, it’s good you’ll take them.”

He nudged Jeffery with a hint of urgency. “Well? Where’s the lawyer? He should be here by now.”

Right then, Jeffery checked his phone—just as a new message popped up. “The lawyer’s already at the restaurant!”

For a second, Linsey blinked at their collective reaction, caught off guard by their enthusiasm. But she recovered quickly, steady as ever.

She answered, her tone unwavering, “I mean it. If you’ve all decided to hand over the shares, then I’m taking them. It’s the smart move financially and honestly, it’s what I deserve.”

Linsey glanced at Jeffery, her smile sly and unbothered. “If Alexa hadn’t swapped me at birth, and I’d lived with you, I’d have been a far better leader for this company than you ever were.”