

Zillionaire 1071

Chapter 1071:

Collin cut him off smoothly. “Hmm? You are what?”

Jeffery froze, words caught in his throat. He had always seen Linsey as a sister. But to her, he wasn’t quite family. That thought wiped the playfulness from his face.

Linsey quietly took the report from Jeffery, her eyes briefly scanning his expression. She could read him easily.

She hadn’t planned to say anything, but then she remembered how Jeffery had helped earlier—running around with her, handling the hospital process, carrying test results from place to place.

Out of courtesy, she spoke gently. “We really should thank Jeffery. He helped me get Shari admitted and took care of a lot. It wasn’t easy.”

Linsey paused for a beat, then tossed out, half-teasing and half-sincere, “Honestly, after everything, we should go a little easier on Jeffery today.”

Shari, stretched out on the hospital bed, jumped in right away. “Exactly! He’s been a huge help just now. I really mean it, I’m so grateful.” She shot Linsey a look full of genuine appreciation. “Thank you both, really. If you hadn’t shown up, I would have been in big trouble.” Shari understood all too well that on her own, she never would have stood a chance against Harold. Without their help, she would have been dragged back and probably faced something even worse.

Linsey returned to Shari’s side and sat, gently shaking her head. “Shari, you don’t have to thank us. Just focus on resting and getting your strength back.”

With that, she picked up Shari’s medical report and began scanning it carefully.

Jeffery spoke up from nearby. “The doctor said it’s nothing major. All she needs is a bit of rest.”

Hearing this, Linsey finally let herself relax and gave Jeffery a grateful nod. "Thanks for looking out for her."

Jeffery didn't say anything right away. But Collin, watching from the side, noticed something new in Linsey's tone.

He could tell that whatever bad blood there was between Linsey and Jeffery seemed to have faded. Though Collin didn't know the full story, Linsey's feelings were always his first concern.

Collin offered a small, genuine smile. "Thank you, Mr. Lawson. We really owe you one. Let us treat you to dinner soon."

Those words only seemed to make Jeffery feel more isolated, his mood sinking lower.

Everyone here thanked him, and it made him feel like an outsider. The more Jeffery dwelled on everything, the heavier his mood became. Ever since Linsey's true background had come to light, he had felt an obligation to look out for her.

Still, no matter what he did, Linsey kept him at arm's length, never seeing him as a brother.

Those thoughts left a bitter taste as Jeffery pressed his lips together and spoke quietly. "No need to thank me. It was nothing, really." With that, he drifted over to the sofa and sat, making it clear he planned to stay for a while.

"Did you come here by yourself? What about Alicia and your parents? Have they left the restaurant yet?" Linsey asked, her voice gentle. Collin pulled up another chair, settling in beside Linsey, and glanced over, picking up on her concern.

Jeffery answered honestly, "Before I left, I arranged for someone to take them home. Things were getting out of hand, and I didn't want Alicia caught up in the chaos."

Somewhere in the middle of the conversation, Jeffery felt a strange sense of balance. After all, Linsey didn't seem to see him as her brother, but then, she kept the same distance from Myla and Cruz.

Chapter 1072:

Reflecting on everything since they had crossed paths again, Jeffery realized Linsey's only warmth was reserved for Alicia.

Without a doubt, Linsey nodded in agreement. "That's a good call. Alicia's pregnancy is well along now, so it's best to avoid crowds whenever possible. It's too easy for something to go wrong."

A wave of helplessness mingled with relief as Jeffery came to terms with the truth. Alicia had seen it clearly from the start—there was something unmistakable between her and Linsey, a quiet pull that bound them in a way he couldn't deny.

Scanning the room, Linsey caught sight of a sudden sadness in Shari's eyes. A single name—Elva—suddenly echoed through Linsey's thoughts.

Memory rushed back: just recently, while witnessing Harold bully Shari in the restaurant, Linsey had overheard her desperately calling out for Elva.

Curiosity pushed her to speak up. "Shari, who is Elva?" she asked, her voice even as she watched for any sign in Shari's face. "I thought I heard you say something about treating Elva when we were at the restaurant."

Their college years had built a strong bond between them. Puzzling over the past, Linsey was certain there had never been anyone named Elva in Shari's life.

Instant tension tightened Shari's features. For a heartbeat, she hesitated before replying, "What? Elva? You're mistaken, Linsey. I never said that."

A shaky smile tried to hide the truth, but Linsey could feel the underlying tension.

Softening her voice, Linsey continued with concern, “If you’re in trouble, please talk to me, Shari. I can only help if you let me in.” Reading between the lines, she added gently, “Don’t worry about burdening me. Whatever’s going on, I want to help. Don’t shut me out, promise?”

With Linsey’s genuine concern reflected in her eyes, Shari felt something inside her begin to break. Within moments, tears pooled in her eyes, painting her cheeks red. All the pressure she had carried seemed to leave her raw and exposed. Even a few kind words from Linsey almost undid her entirely.

Drawing in a trembling breath, Shari braced herself to share everything. But right at that moment, her phone began to ring, cutting through the silence.

Caught off guard, Shari took a breath, steadied herself, and answered the call. Glancing at the screen, she saw the name of a coworker from the restaurant—a friend she trusted.

Not bothering to think twice, she hit the answer button.

Urgency crackled through the line before she could even say hello. “Shari! Harold’s brother just took Elva away!”

“What?!” Shock froze her in place for an instant, but adrenaline quickly took over. She shot upright in the hospital bed, panic spreading through her chest.

Linsey felt her own pulse jump, recognizing that something serious was unfolding. A worried crease formed on her forehead as she locked eyes with Shari, then flicked her gaze over to Collin, the tension unmistakable.

The distressed voice continued through the phone, “It just happened. Harold got hurt badly and needs looking after. Since you were gone, Harold’s brother grabbed Elva and left...”

“Is Walter completely out of his mind? Elva’s just seven years old—and she’s still unwell. How could he even think of putting her through something like this? What on earth is going through his head?” Shari screamed, her voice laced with fury and disbelief.

Chapter 1073:

Walter Sanchez, Harold's younger brother, had a reputation for doing little and frequently begging Harold for money. Even when Harold's patience wore thin and harsh words were thrown his way, Walter still lingered, impossible to get rid of.

If Harold was unpredictable and quick to anger, then Walter was trouble through and through. Dealing with either man was a challenge on its own.

Shari couldn't imagine what had driven Walter to take Elva away, but her instincts told her he had some scheme in mind.

With her breath ragged, Shari said, her voice raw, "Walter must have taken Elva to the same hospital where Harold's staying. I'm heading there right now!"

Shari abruptly ended the call and reflexively reached to yank the IV needle from her hand.

"Shari!" Linsey intervened swiftly, her brow furrowing. "What are you—"

When Linsey glanced up again, she was startled to see tears of anguish streaming down Shari's face.

"Linsey, my daughter... I have to save my daughter..." Overwhelmed, Shari clutched Linsey's wrist with a desperate grip. "Walter, Harold's brother, forcibly took my daughter Elva from the restaurant where I work!"

Linsey's face immediately hardened with resolve.

She now understood that Elva was Shari's daughter, but this wasn't the moment for probing questions.

Rising to her feet, Linsey pressed a firm hand on Shari's shoulder. "Stay calm and leave this to me. Rest here for now."

Shari stared at Linsey, disbelief flickering in her eyes. "Linsey, but..."

"Trust me, Shari." Linsey gestured toward Collin. "Collin founded CR Corporation, a major force in Grester, and I've secured a stake in the Lawson Group's authority. Do you think we can't handle someone like Walter?"

Shari's eyes widened in shock at the revelation.

She turned her gaze to Collin, then back to Linsey, utterly stunned. She had heard of CR Corporation, of course, and its founder's identity was no secret. However, she was too preoccupied with her own life to pay attention to people and things unrelated to her.

The idea that Linsey's boyfriend was CR Corporation's founder was astonishing, and Linsey's connection to the Lawson Group was even more staggering.

Meanwhile, Collin raised an eyebrow, mildly surprised. He hadn't realized Linsey had already acquired shares in the Lawson Group. Glancing at Jeffery, who lounged on the sofa with a faintly smug expression, Collin noted the subtle pride in his demeanor.

Harold's hospital ward was in the same facility as Shari's, so it didn't take Linsey long to locate it.

"It hurts like hell! Where's the damn doctor? Get them here now!" Before Linsey even stepped inside, Harold's loud groans of pain echoed through the corridor.

As he shared a room with other patients, his outbursts quickly drew their ire.

"Keep it down, will you?"

"Some of us are trying to rest!"

Harold snapped back, his face contorted in agony. "What do you know? Look at me! That bitch did this to me! If I see her again, I'll make her regret it!"

At that moment, Linsey approached his bedside, her voice cool and steady. “Oh? I’m right here. How exactly do you plan to make me regret it?”

Chapter 1074:

Harold froze, his eyes locking onto Linsey. A tremor ran through him, fear rising uncontrollably from deep within. “W-what are you doing here?”

He instinctively tried to shrink back, the sharp pain from his injuries draining the color from his face.

He had crossed paths with Linsey just once, yet the memory was unforgettable, haunting even his fleeting moments of sleep with vivid dreams of her. Not because of her striking appearance, but due to the sheer force of her devastating kick.

Noticing the terror etched across his face, Linsey quirked a brow, her gaze fixed on Harold with a spark of curiosity as she settled into the chair by his bedside.

“I just stopped by to see how you’re holding up,” Linsey said, letting her gaze drift down to Harold’s private parts. “I wanted to check if my kick did any permanent damage to your dick.”

Linsey made no attempt to keep her voice down, so every word rang out in the quiet ward, catching the attention of nearby patients and families. A wave of sympathy swept through the room as every eye landed on Harold.

Embarrassment and fury flashed across Harold’s face. “You—”

“Let’s not waste time,” Linsey cut him off before he could finish. “Where’s Walter? Tell me where your brother is.”

Harold’s composure returned almost instantly, and he gave a cruel, mocking chuckle. His confidence grew. “So, Shari sent you, huh? Figures that she’d rely on someone else.”

Linsey kept her silence. She reached for the fruit knife on the table, sliding it free with slow precision.

“What are you doing?!” The bravado vanished from Harold’s voice. His entire body trembled as terror settled back in. Nothing frightened him more than her presence.

He clearly remembered someone yelling for the police right before he lost consciousness in the restaurant. Because of that, he had convinced himself Linsey was already in custody.

Since Harold still wouldn’t cooperate, Linsey pressed her lips together and edged the knife closer to him, the tip hovering just above his skin.

“Somebody help! Call the police!” Panic shot through Harold’s words as he strained his neck, screaming for anyone nearby. “She’s lost her mind! Why are you just standing there?!”

Linsey’s actions left the whole room frozen in shock, no one daring to intervene.

The urgency in Harold’s voice finally jolted the room into action. A few people scrambled to dial emergency services, while others hesitated, torn between calling for help and staying out of it.

Linsey didn’t seem bothered in the slightest. She spoke up, her words ringing out with surprising steadiness. “Before you get involved, maybe you should ask yourselves if you really want to protect someone who hurts his own family. This guy’s spent years abusing his wife, and he doesn’t spare his daughter, either.”

“He doesn’t deserve your sympathy.” With a casual flick of her wrist, she lowered the knife, her tone shifting as she added, “Besides, it’s not like I’d actually do anything to him here. We’re in a hospital, aren’t we? I’m not some criminal on the run.”

Relief started to creep across Harold’s face when Linsey suddenly thrust the knife back up, so fast that he froze in place.

Chapter 1075:

Panic gripped him so tightly that Harold couldn't manage a single word.

Linsey's voice, calm and almost teasing, broke through the silence. "Oh, one more thing. My fiancé founded CR Corporation. I'm sure you've heard of him, right? Maybe you're wondering why the police haven't dragged me away yet?"

A thin beam of sunlight caught the blade, making it flash menacingly just inches from Harold's eyes.

Horror widened his eyes, and as Linsey's words settled in, he turned even paler.

He was left stunned, unable to respond, caught up in disbelief. Doubt clouded his mind. Harold just couldn't accept Linsey's claim, certain that Shari could never have connections that influential.

Convinced Linsey was bluffing, Harold clung to his stubborn denial, his breaths coming in short, ragged bursts. Stiff as a board, he stared Linsey down and finally shouted, "Somebody call 911!"

In his mind, the bystanders were fools for buying into Linsey's act. He couldn't bring himself to accept that she might actually be telling the truth.

Linsey watched Harold squirm, a hint of satisfaction in her eyes as the fear on his face grew more obvious with every second.

Still completely composed, she addressed the rest of the ward. "If you're still not sure, there's no need to panic. Just check CR Corporation's official website or social media accounts. You'll see my face right there."

Linsey's voice remained even. She was unruffled by Harold's accusations, exuding a quiet confidence.

Her poised manner reassured those in the ward, making her claims seem more credible.

After all, who in Grester would dare falsely declare themselves the fiancée of CR Corporation's founder?

Beyond that, Linsey's captivating beauty and commanding presence marked her as anything but ordinary.

Spurred by intrigue, several onlookers pulled out their phones, eagerly searching for CR Corporation's social media profile.

Harold, realizing the focus had shifted from his safety to Linsey's identity, erupted in anger.

"Have you all lost it?" he yelled, voice thick with frustration. "This woman's got a knife! She's here to kill me! Why aren't you calling the police?"

A dismissive voice cut through his tirade. "You abused your wife and daughter. Why should we save you? She hasn't even done anything yet. Why the panic?"

Linsey's earlier words lingered in their minds.

Since Harold's admission to the ward, whispers of his behavior had spread—berating and striking his wife in public, even trying to forcibly drag her from the restaurant where she worked. Such shameful acts earned him nothing but scorn.

Harold's eyes bulged as he snapped, "What was that? Say it again!" No sooner had he shouted than the tip of a fruit knife angled toward his face.

He froze, not daring to flinch, certain that any sudden move would draw blood from the blade hovering inches away.

Regardless of whether the police would come to arrest Linsey, he had no intention of suffering more injuries. After all, his private parts were still in pain.

Chapter 1076:

Just then, a shocked exclamation pierced the air. “No way! It’s real! Look at this! She’s actually engaged to Collin Riley, the CR Corporation founder! That’s her in the photo—it’s unmistakable!”

Harold’s heart jolted. His gaze darted cautiously to the group clustered around a phone, their faces alight with amazement as they glanced between Linsey and the screen. A chilling dread surged through him.

One onlooker, thriving on the drama, stepped forward and shoved the phone in Harold’s face.

As he glimpsed the screen, his vision blurred, his mind going blank.

It was a recent post from CR Corporation’s official account, written in a rare, lighthearted tone, praising the romantic bond of the founder and his fiancée. Below was a vivid photo of the couple.

The man, strikingly handsome with a cool, distant demeanor, had a subtle warmth in his gaze. Beside him stood a woman, gracefully stunning, her radiant smile perfectly complementing his aura.

Harold recognized the woman in the photo instantly, shock coursing through him.

It took a moment for him to snap back, his eyes now wide with terror as he stared at Linsey beside him. Forcing a weak, trembling smile, he tried to mask his fear.

This woman was indeed the fiancée of the founder of CR Corporation. Not only that, but she clearly held a special place in his heart, above all others.

Why else would the company’s official account, which typically reserved its posts for business announcements, suddenly break protocol to publicly acknowledge the founder’s fiancée?

Tears welled in Harold’s eyes as his composure finally cracked.

“Well? Are you convinced now?” A cold smile played at the corners of Linsey’s mouth, never quite reaching her eyes.

Had it not been for her desperate need to find Shari’s daughter, she wouldn’t have wasted another second on Harold’s pathetic existence. Since stepping into this sterile hospital room, Linsey couldn’t deny the burning desire for vengeance still coursing through her veins. One swift kick had hardly been enough justice, especially when that meddling doctor had intervened to cure the worthless man. Standing up for Shari meant applying real pressure to this jerk.

“Tell me about your relationship with Shari.”

Harold’s breath caught in his throat as he voiced the question that had been gnawing at him.

Years of marriage to Shari, yet he had never known anyone like Linsey existed in her world. Everything Linsey had done proved their bond ran deeper than mere acquaintance. Her fierce loyalty to Shari spoke volumes about their connection.

The realization left Harold torn between regret for his ignorance of Shari’s relationships and terror at the punishment that awaited him.

Ice filled Linsey’s stare as she gazed down at Harold, her voice carrying the chill of winter itself.

“Shari and I were close friends back in college.” Her eyelids lifted slowly, each word dropping like a funeral bell. “But let me be crystal clear about something. I despise seeing defenseless women trampled underfoot. Back at that restaurant, whether I knew your victim or not, I would have intervened.”

A soft laugh escaped her lips, though it held no warmth.

“After all, when your fiancée founded CR Corporation, you gain certain privileges. Whatever I do, whoever I cross, he’ll always have my back, won’t he?”

Chapter 1077:

Harold's composure shattered completely. Sobs wracked his body as all pretense of dignity abandoned him, leaving only raw desperation.

"I was wrong! I know I was wrong! Please, just let me go!" Panic struck him as a memory surfaced. "Elva... she's home! My brother took her there for me."

Tears streamed down his face as the words tumbled out. "I never meant to harm Elva. She's my daughter too. I could never hurt her. I just thought... if I brought her home, Shari would have no choice but to come back as well."

"You're using Elva as a weapon against Shari!" Fury twisted Linsey's features as her jaw clenched tight with rage.

She pulled back her hand and swiftly retrieved her phone, fingers flying across the screen as she typed a message to Collin.

Within moments, Collin's response appeared, confirming he would dispatch a team immediately to retrieve Elva safely from Harold's residence.

"You're lower than scum! Mistreating your own wife and daughter!" Linsey put her phone away, anger still radiating from every pore as she continued her verbal assault. "That little girl is fighting for her life, needing expensive treatments that could save her. Instead of working to provide for your daughter's medical care, you sabotage Shari's efforts to earn money and humiliate her right in front of Elva!"

Linsey's breath came in sharp bursts as she spoke, her chest rising and falling with the intensity of her rage toward Harold's vile actions. Without meeting Shari's eyes, she shuddered to think how much more torment Shari and Elva would have suffered in silence.

And without Collin's help, would she have ever found the strength to deliver proper justice for Shari?

Her teeth clenched behind closed lips, while tears of grief and fury gathered in her eyes, threatening to spill.

“You did what needed to be done, and every one of us stands behind you! Rest assured, we won’t call 911. Even if the police came here, we won’t breathe a word to them.”

“Exactly! Scum like him earned every bit of punishment he got!” Each witness to Linsey’s confrontation with Harold voiced their support with passionate conviction.

Harold burned with the desire to unleash a string of curses at these hypocrites. Obviously, they were just kissing up to Linsey because she was engaged to the founder of CR Corporation. What a bunch of shameless bootlickers!

Linsey kept her eyes downcast, offering only a polite “thank you” rather than encouraging their enthusiasm.

The fruit knife clattered as she tossed it aside carelessly, then turned on her heel and walked out with purposeful strides.

Behind her, the strangers continued their animated discussion about her connection to Collin. She walked in silence, their chatter stirring an uncomfortable knot in her stomach.

The moment she cleared the ward’s threshold, someone grabbed her arm and yanked her aside.

“Linsey!” Blinking in confusion, Linsey turned to find Dolores approaching with urgent concern written across her face. “Jeffery just filled me in on what happened at the restaurant. Tell me, did you manage to find Shari’s daughter?”

Dolores had only met Shari a handful of times years ago, so she barely knew the woman personally.

Chapter 1078:

Still, hearing about Shari's terrible ordeal made her chest burn with feminine solidarity and rage.

After spending some time comforting Shari in the ward, she had rushed downstairs to look for Linsey, arriving just as she emerged from Harold's room.

Something felt off the moment Dolores laid eyes on Linsey, immediately picking up on her dejected aura.

Assuming the worst about Elva's situation, Dolores pressed with growing concern, "Linsey, what's gone wrong?"

Recognizing the misunderstanding, Linsey quickly set the record straight. "Nothing like that. Harold told me his brother took Elva home, and Collin's already dispatched his people there."

Her lips pressed together as she continued quietly, "We could have had Collin's team track Walter's movements directly after he took Elva, which would have led us to her just as quickly. But Shari explained that Elva's mental state has deteriorated since her illness began. Familiar surroundings don't trigger her, but if Walter brought her somewhere new, she'd spiral into complete panic."

Understanding dawned on Dolores's face. "She'd be terrified seeing a bunch of strangers show up suddenly. We need to handle this delicately, not charge in recklessly."

A reassuring smile crossed her lips as she squeezed Linsey's shoulder. "From what you're telling me, everything sounds like it's moving in the right direction. So why do you still look so troubled?"

Linsey gazed into Dolores's perceptive eyes, unsurprised that her oldest friend could read her so easily. Twenty-plus years of friendship had taught Dolores to see right through her masks.

Rather than deflect, Linsey decided on complete honesty. After a moment's consideration, she took Dolores's hand and guided her toward the exit.

“I gave Harold quite the scare by using the title of CR Corporation’s founder’s fiancée—and it worked like a charm,” Linsey said with a smirk. “He was full of himself at first, but by the end, he was practically in tears.”

Dolores burst out laughing. “Ah, so that’s why the CR Corporation’s official account suddenly posted that photo of you and Collin. I thought Collin was marking his territory—but now it all makes sense.”

The two women strolled leisurely across the grassy lawn inside the hospital, the scent of morning dew still lingering in the air.

Linsey’s expression turned pensive. “Honestly, being Collin’s fiancée is incredibly useful. It lets me solve problems with minimal fuss and in record time.”

Then, as if weighed down by a sudden thought, she let out a soft sigh. “But I keep wondering... what if I wasn’t engaged to Collin? What if I had no connection to CR Corporation? How would I have protected Shari today?”

Dolores blinked and grinned. “Why torment yourself with all these ‘what ifs’? Right now, you are Collin’s fiancée. Why worry about imaginary scenarios?”

She nudged her playfully. “His power and resources come with the package. They’re yours, too.”

“I suppose you’re right...” Linsey conceded with a small nod. She glanced around to make sure no one was listening, then leaned in closer to whisper, “Collin and I may have reconciled, but who’s to say we won’t clash again someday, maybe even separate again? You saw what happened during the four years I spent abroad without him—it wasn’t exactly a walk in the park...”

Dolores rolled her eyes dramatically and gave Linsey a light bop on the forehead.

Chapter 1079:

“Ouch! What was that for?” Linsey yelped, rubbing the spot with mock indignation.

“To knock some sense into you, obviously,” Dolores huffed, though her tone was fond.

Then her expression softened. “Don’t forget who you are. You’re the renowned designer in Grester. Who says you can’t make it on your own? Certainly not me!”

Linsey narrowed her eyes in mock suspicion. “You didn’t have to hit me to prove a point. Is there some deep-seated grudge I don’t know about?”

Dolores chuckled but quickly grew serious again. “Look, even if you weren’t Collin’s fiancée, you’d still be you. Brave. Smart. Fierce. That strength you showed today? That was all you. Collin didn’t put that fire in you. You did.”

She crossed her arms. “And if Harold ever dares to act up again, you could expose him online as Aurora. Let the internet roast him while we file a police report. You’d still have taken a stand—and I’d be right there with you.”

Linsey could feel Dolores’ sincerity in every word. It moved her more than she expected. She looked at her friend and smiled warmly. “You make a lot of sense.”

Then, after a moment of quiet reflection, she added, “I honestly don’t know if I would’ve had the courage to pummel Harold straight into the hospital without Collin behind me. But one thing’s for sure—I wouldn’t have stood by and done nothing. I would’ve stepped in to protect Shari.”

Dolores beamed. “Now that’s the Linsey I know. Bold and fearless.” She reached up and patted Linsey’s head with affection.

Linsey fell silent again, her thoughts drifting back to Joanne’s threats. Whether it meant relying on her own strength or borrowing Collin’s influence, one thing was certain—she had to protect Shari and Dolores. She couldn’t let Joanne’s schemes succeed. Not on her watch.

With her resolve firm and her heart lighter, Linsey linked arms with Dolores. “I haven’t even asked—did you find a good venue?”

The instant those words left Linsey's lips, Dolores' smile turned rigid, freezing on her face like cracked paint.

After a telling pause, she forced her mouth back into an upward curve and feigned nonchalance. "Everything went well. I found several promising options."

Instinctively, she hoped to brush the topic aside without deeper scrutiny.

Although she regained her composure quickly, Linsey's sharp instincts caught that fleeting shift in her demeanor.

"What's wrong?" The question came with a deepening frown, Linsey's voice taking on a more serious edge.

That morning, Dolores had practically bounced out the door, radiating excitement. Joy over planning Dustin's birthday celebration had filled every fiber of her being. This sudden change in behavior struck a discordant note.

Already carrying guilt over missing their venue-hunting appointment that morning, Linsey felt her concern multiply at seeing her friend's unusual state.

Meeting Linsey's penetrating gaze, Dolores easily recognized the worry swimming in those clear depths. Another smile crossed her lips as she gave Linsey's arm a gentle pat. "Really, you're overthinking this. I'm perfectly fine."

Linsey's brow creased deeper, clearly unconvinced by such a dismissive response.

Weighing her options for a moment, she watched Dolores maintain her stubborn silence before playing her trump card. "If you won't give me the truth, I'll just ask Collin to investigate for me. You said it yourself that we're joined at the hip. His resources are mine to use. One way or another, I'll get to the bottom of this."

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Chapter 1080:

Dolores' eyes widened in genuine surprise before she let out a defeated chuckle. "Linsey, you're being completely unfair right now."

"Absolutely I am. The question is whether you can stand to keep lying to my face." Linsey's lower lip jutted out in an exaggerated pout, her expression the picture of wounded betrayal.

Linsey's sideways glances became impossible to miss, her obvious attempts at reading Dolores' reactions turning into a persistent study.

The constant scrutiny left Dolores with nowhere to hide.

All at once, the melancholy that had settled like a stone in Dolores' chest simply evaporated. There was no point in wasting precious energy mourning what had never truly been hers. This realization brought instant clarity to her muddled thoughts.

A gentle exhale escaped her lips, and genuine relief bloomed across her features. "Linsey, I ran into Dustin and Joanne this morning. They were browsing jewelry together at one of the upscale stores, with Dustin's mother chaperoning the whole affair."

Dolores recounted her morning encounter with surprising composure. Even before she finished that first revelation, Linsey's eyebrows drew together in a subtle frown. Sympathy and concern flickered unmistakably in her gaze as she looked at her friend.

Continuing with steady calm, Dolores laid out the entire scene, including how the Wade family had essentially arranged for Joanne to serve as Dustin's companion for his birthday celebration.

By the time she finished, Linsey had pieced together the painful picture. Dustin had never breathed a word about any birthday dinner to Dolores. From her vantage point, she had witnessed her boyfriend sharing intimate moments with another woman right there in public view. What made it worse was that Dolores had spent weeks secretly planning a romantic surprise for his special day.

Tragically, Dustin had already filled that precious time slot without giving her a second thought.

Beyond that betrayal, their recent relationship had been reduced to secret meetings, while Hester made her disapproval crystal clear at every turn.

A weary sigh escaped Dolores' lips. "I used to have unshakeable faith in what Dustin and I shared, but it's strange how quickly everything crumbled once doubt crept in. The moment I considered walking away, holding on became impossible."

A shuddering breath escaped her lips, moisture gathering in her eyes as Dolores gazed at Linsey. Her voice emerged hoarse and fractured, each word catching on barely restrained sobs. "Linsey, I'm really tired." The confession broke something inside Dolores, and soft sniffles began to escape despite her efforts to contain them.

Days of accumulated stress crashed over her like a wave, the weight so crushing she could barely draw breath.

Linsey's heart lurched. Without hesitation, she guided Dolores to an empty corner and pulled her into a fierce embrace.

Dolores had believed she could maintain her composure, but the moment Linsey's warmth enveloped her and that familiar, comforting scent filled her senses, her carefully constructed walls crumbled.

Her teeth sank into her lower lip as tears spilled over, though she fought to muffle her sobs and avoid drawing curious stares from passersby.