

Zillionaire 1101

Chapter 1101:

“Oh right, Linsey. I haven’t even congratulated you on getting married,” Shari said with a warm smile. “I never really knew why you and Collin split up before, but I’m happy you found your way back to each other.”

Linsey smiled a little, almost shyly. “Being with someone for that long... fights and misunderstandings just come with the territory.”

“But seriously, seeing you this happy makes me happy,” Shari said, eyes warm and honest. “Even four years ago, I could tell. Collin was head over heels for you. At that college reunion? I wasn’t even close to you two, and I still felt it. Linsey, you’ve got something really special. I can’t lie, I’m a little jealous.”

Linsey didn’t say anything right away. Then she reached out, held Shari’s hand tight, and said with quiet strength, “Everything you went through? That’s behind you now. You and Elva are going to live a good life. No more pain.”

She turned to Elva with a warm smile. “I’ve gotta say, I’m a little jealous. You’ve raised such a smart, polite girl. I really hope my two kids turn out like her when they’re older.”

Right at that moment, the doctor Linsey had requested showed up.

The doctor was there to run a basic check-up on Elva.

So Linsey quietly stepped outside to wait, leaving Shari alone with Elva in the room.

As Linsey walked out of the room, she spotted a woman in a sharp business suit heading her way.

“Hi, are you Linsey Riley?” the woman asked, clearly recognizing her. She stepped forward and offered a polite handshake. “I’m Essie Wallace. We spoke on the phone this morning.”

Linsey shook her hand with a quick smile and said, "Essie, I'll leave everything about Shari to you now. Thanks for coming."

Essie smiled calmly. "Shari's got solid evidence. I'm feeling confident about this divorce case. At the very least, I'll make sure she and Elva get the compensation they're owed."

After a short pause, Essie's expression hardened. "As for Harold," she said firmly, her eyes turning cold, "he's going to pay for what he did."

Linsey felt a wave of relief just watching how confident Essie looked.

"I did some digging beforehand. Harold and Walter have been living off Shari for years. They don't have any money saved up, definitely not enough to afford a real lawyer. And the abuse Harold put Shari and Elva through? It's all well-documented. This won't take much effort," Linsey said, locking eyes with Essie. "What I need from you is to make sure Harold gets hit with the harshest punishment possible. I want him so scared that even when he gets out, he'll never go near Shari or Elva again."

Essie gave a knowing nod. "We lawyers usually have to play things by the book," she said. "But men like that make my blood boil. Don't worry. I'll handle everything."

Then she looked at Linsey with a warm smile. "I saw the video online. About how you jumped in to protect Shari. That's what pulled me into this case. Whether it's about defending Shari's rights or recognizing what you did that day, I'm going to give this my all."

A little while later, Shari came out of the clinic with Elva, who had just finished her check-up.

Linsey took the chance to introduce Essie to Shari.

Shari was honestly shocked that Linsey had found her such a well-known and respected divorce lawyer.

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Chapter 1102:

If Linsey hadn't kept brushing off her thanks, Shari probably would have burst into tears right then and there. The four of them went out to lunch together.

While they ate, Essie went over a few important details with Shari. Once they gathered all the necessary evidence and submitted it to the court, Harold would get a court summons soon after. After lunch, Essie left, taking the documents with her.

Linsey drove Shari and Elva back to the hospital. On the ride back, Elva dozed off, sleeping soundly in her mother's arms.

Shari gently draped a coat over Elva and looked over at Linsey, who was focused on the road. Her voice was soft. "The doctor said Elva's doing really well. Right now is the best time to do the surgery. They can schedule it for tomorrow."

"That's great," Linsey replied. "Then let's follow the doctor's advice and have Elva's surgery tomorrow. But I have to go to a friend's birthday party tomorrow, so I might not be able to come right away. Call me if anything happens."

"It's okay. Just go ahead and do what you need to do," Shari said with a small smile. "You've planned everything so well for Elva and me that it's very unlikely anything will go wrong."

With a skilled medical team ready and a trustworthy security team to protect them, there really was nothing to worry about.

Linsey replied in a serious tone, "You're my good friend, and of course, I'll do everything I can to help you. Don't worry about a thing, and call me after Elva's surgery. If I can be there, I will definitely come." She paused, then teased with a playful smile, "But tomorrow, I do have a big drama to perform. Let's hope everything works out well for all of us."

Hearing that, Shari blinked, looking confused. "A big drama? What kind of drama?"

“You’ll find out soon enough,” Linsey replied mysteriously.

The Wade family’s carefully planned birthday celebration for Dustin arrived right on schedule.

Outside the grand hotel, the entrance sparkled with elaborate décor while a parade of flashy sports cars and sleek limousines lined the curb. Guests dressed in their finest poured through the doors, quickly filling the hall with chatter and laughter.

Dolores slipped in wearing a form-fitting evening gown—simple, understated elegance—with her hair left loose down her back, untouched by accessories or jewels.

Eyes fixed ahead, she fought the urge to turn and bolt.

Yesterday’s conversation with Linsey echoed in her mind, urging her to hold her ground. Drawing a deep breath, she pushed forward. The moment she entered the banquet hall, the scene unfolded before her.

A glance across the crowded room landed on Dustin, walking shoulder to shoulder with Joanne.

Dustin’s deep blue suit matched perfectly with Joanne’s sweeping gown, the coordinated look making their connection impossible to miss.

Dolores stood there, catching snippets of whispered gossip swirling around her.

“Who’s that woman with Dustin? Which big-name family does she come from? Looks like she’s about to become his fiancée.”

“That’s Joanne Ellis. She was just accepted into the Walton family, and rumor has it Hester’s taken a real shine to her.”

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Chapter 1103:

“Let’s not forget—Hester’s been running Wade Group for years, yet she never changed the company name to her own. Odd, considering her power.”

“Maybe she’s biding her time for Dustin to take over. Even with all her dislike for her husband, Dustin’s still her son. And honestly, the board would never agree to rebrand the company.”

“Exactly. There’s a whole line of Wade relatives who’ve been waiting for years for Hester to step down. My guess? She’s grooming Dustin to claim the throne—and tying him to the Walton family seals the deal.”

“The marriage between the Wade and Walton families would bring gains to both sides.”

Those words echoed in Dolores’ ears, sending a wave of cold dread through her chest.

It was hard not to believe that Dustin’s only motivation was to keep Hester satisfied, clearing the way for him to take charge of the Wade Group.

Never had she thought he would be so fixated on power and prestige that he would willingly cast their bond aside.

As she realized this, a hollow laugh slipped from her lips—she had been fooling herself all along.

By now, it was clear: Dustin saw her as utterly replaceable.

Today marked the end. Dolores resolved to cut Dustin from her heart for good.

“Dolores, I’m glad you made it.”

The sound of her name pulled Dolores from her thoughts. Joanne had approached, her face bright with a friendly smile.

Dustin stood just beside her, his posture stiff, eyes cool and unreadable as he glanced in Dolores' direction.

The urge to stride over and shake answers out of him surged within her—to demand why he had sent that message to Collin the previous night, to force him to explain himself. He was the one who had told her to come.

But now that she was right in front of him, he acted as if she was a complete stranger.

A bitter suspicion took root—had this all been a cruel game for his amusement?

Dolores' lashes trembled as she fought to hold herself together, but when her gaze landed on Joanne once more, she wore a mask of perfect composure.

"Ms. Ellis, since you invited me yourself, how could I possibly turn down your hospitality?" Dolores replied, her tone calm and even.

She then turned to Dustin, offering a polite, measured smile. "Happy birthday, Dustin. I assumed you already have everything you could want, so I didn't dare bring a gift you might not need."

Joanne watched Dustin carefully, catching the brief flicker of emotion in his eyes.

A faint, satisfied smile played on her lips. Everything was unfolding exactly as she had hoped.

She could tell that Dolores and Dustin still held feelings for each other, and with just a little nudge, today's gathering would give her exactly what she wanted.

Joanne let out a soft, knowing laugh. "Oh, Dolores, you're being too humble. If anyone in Grester knows Dustin best, it's you."

Then, with a teasing edge, she added, “Relax, Hester’s not here yet, so you two have plenty of time to catch up.”

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Chapter 1104:

Dolores froze for a second, her brows knitting as she shot Joanne a puzzled look.

She remembered that not long ago, in the jewelry store, Joanne had nearly let it slip to Hester about her secret meetings with Dustin.

Now, Joanne was suddenly acting as if she was on their side.

Whatever Joanne was plotting, Dolores knew she couldn’t afford to get caught up in any drama tonight.

She shrugged it off and replied lightly, “Ms. Ellis, there’s nothing left for Dustin and me to discuss. I’ll just head inside.”

With that, Dolores stepped forward, intending to walk right past Joanne.

But just as she did, Joanne’s hand shot out and grabbed her wrist in a surprisingly strong grip. Dolores gasped in pain, her brows drawing together as she instinctively flinched.

Joanne leaned in, her breath warm against Dolores’s ear, and spoke in a slow, deliberate whisper. “Just so you know, Dolores, today isn’t just Dustin’s birthday party. It’s also our engagement party.”

Dolores’s eyes went wide, shock rippling through her as she turned around to face Joanne.

Amusement danced in Joanne's eyes, her lips curling into a victorious, icy smile that sent a shudder through Dolores.

"In a little while, Hester will make the announcement in front of everyone. By the end of tonight, I'll be Dustin's fiancée," Joanne continued, not even bothering to keep her voice down.

Dolores was sure Dustin had caught every word Joanne said.

But he didn't so much as flinch, almost like he was quietly agreeing with everything Joanne said.

A cold, heavy fear settled over Dolores.

She wished more than anything that she hadn't come.

Jaw tight, Dolores said nothing, struggling to pull her wrist free from Joanne's grasp.

But Joanne's hold only tightened, refusing to let her go.

Leaning in closer, Joanne dropped her voice to a whisper. "Do you know why you lost to me, Dolores?"

Dolores fought to keep her breathing steady as Joanne let out a soft, triumphant laugh. "You probably haven't heard yet, but Dustin left CR Corporation a few days ago. If he wants to run Wade Group, he has to marry me."

At that, Dolores turned around to look at Dustin, her face etched with disbelief.

News that Dustin had quit CR Corporation left Dolores completely stunned; she hadn't heard a single whisper about it before now.

The idea seemed impossible to her.

Just the previous night, Collin had even shown her a message from Dustin.

Dustin locked eyes with Dolores, almost as if he was silently acknowledging Joanne's words.

Confusion swirled inside Dolores, her thoughts tangled and disoriented. The shock must have been plain on her face, because Joanne's lips curled into a knowing smile.

Leaning in, Joanne said in a slow, almost teasing tone, "Honestly, I think Dustin made the right call. CR Corporation may be impressive, but at the end of the day, it's Collin's empire. What's that got to do with Dustin? Why keep playing a subordinate position at CR Corporation and obeying Collin's orders, when he could go back to the Wade Group? Give it a couple of years, and Wade Group might end up ruling Grester."

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Chapter 1105:

A high-pitched ringing filled Dolores' ears, drowning out everything else.

She stared at Joanne, too shocked to speak, words catching in her throat.

"Joanne, you're really easy to please." Right then, a familiar voice cut through the tension.

Suddenly, Dolores felt the pressure on her wrist disappear, replaced by a gentle touch.

Glancing over, she met Linsey's clear, radiant gaze.

Though Linsey's features remained composed, there was a certain chill about her, a cool, almost mocking distance in her tone as she said, "An engagement party is supposed to be a major celebration, but Dustin's mother scheduled it for his birthday. Your patience is impressive. I know I'd never settle for something so halfhearted."

Linsey's presence alone was enough to make Joanne's hand slip away from Dolores.

Without another word, Linsey calmly took Dolores' hand and guided her aside.

When Linsey glanced down, she spotted the angry red marks left on Dolores' wrist.

"Does it hurt?" Linsey asked quietly, her brows drawing together in concern.

The sight was proof enough for Linsey that Joanne must have gripped far too hard.

Dolores let out a small, dry laugh. "It's nothing. I barely feel it." A little pain didn't bother her, and she wasn't about to stoop to Joanne's level over something so trivial.

To put Linsey at ease, Dolores offered a warm, reassuring smile, making it clear she truly wasn't bothered.

Linsey picked up on Dolores' message, but she wasn't convinced.

The scene was still fresh in her mind—the second she had walked into the ballroom, she had caught sight of Joanne holding Dolores' wrist, pride written all over her face.

At the same time, Dolores wore a strained look, her frustration barely hidden beneath Joanne's overbearing presence.

Linsey hadn't wasted a second as she had marched over right away, even if it meant leaving Collin at the entrance, still lingering outside.

"Linsey, you took your time. We've been waiting," Joanne greeted her smoothly, as if nothing was amiss. After hearing Linsey's earlier jab, a flicker of annoyance crossed Joanne's face before she masked it.

For Joanne, it hardly mattered if this was an engagement celebration or Dustin's birthday.

All that counted was walking away with what she wanted, no matter the occasion.

Truth be told, Dustin had never been her choice to begin with. As she finished speaking, Joanne's eyes wandered past Linsey to the entrance, a faint frown creasing her lips.

Guests were pouring into the hall, yet Collin was still clearly absent. That realization brought a quiet, knowing laugh from Joanne.

"Collin isn't here yet?" Joanne asked with feigned innocence, her eyes glinting with mock concern. "I assumed he'd be arriving with you."

Linsey responded with a faint, enigmatic smile. "He's still tied up with matters at CR Corporation. It's been especially hectic these days."

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Chapter 1106:

Dustin's gaze flickered briefly in her direction, his lips pressing into a thin, unreadable line.

Joanne, however, wasn't about to let it go. Her eyes shifted slyly between Linsey and Dustin, and she teased with a light laugh, "Don't tell me Collin's sudden busyness has something to do with Dustin's abrupt departure from CR Corporation?"

Linsey lowered her gaze slightly, neither confirming nor denying. A flicker of displeasure crossed her face—just enough to make her emotions seem genuine.

If Dustin insisted on staging a falling out with his best friend, then she would play along. After all, she was genuinely curious to see what storm he was plotting to summon.

Finally, Dustin broke his silence. His tone was slow and indifferent. “With Collin’s capabilities, replacing me would have been effortless. The fact that he’s not here likely just means he no longer considers me worth his time.”

“Dustin, what are you even talking about?” Dolores interjected, disbelief etched across her face.

Until now, she had remained quiet, but hearing Dustin speak so dismissively of Collin struck a nerve. She knew better. If not for Collin’s earnest words, she wouldn’t have even considered attending Dustin’s birthday party.

He genuinely hoped she and Dustin wouldn’t miss out on each other. It was clear to her that Collin still saw Dustin as a good friend. Otherwise, someone as famously distant as Collin would have stayed silent.

Dustin’s expression darkened, his voice turning sharp. “Linsey is Collin’s wife. But you? What exactly is your relationship with him? Why are you acting so concerned?”

“You—” Dolores blinked, stunned, staring at him as though he were someone she no longer recognized.

When had Dustin become this person? She had always believed in the deep bond he shared with Collin.

“And even if she is concerned, so what?” Linsey interjected coldly. “You’re criticizing Dolores for being anxious, yet you’re the one behaving like a man unraveling. Anyone watching this would think you were jealous.”

She tilted her head, her voice dripping with irony. “Isn’t this supposed to be your engagement party with Joanne? So tell me—who is your real partner here? Joanne, or Dolores?”

Her laughter was light, but her tone was anything but. “You’re meddling far too much, Dustin. It’s ridiculous.”

With that, Linsey dismissed them both, her contempt palpable. She took Dolores by the hand and walked off without another word, ignoring the hosts entirely.

“Linsey seemed truly upset... Should we send her a gift to smooth things over?” Joanne asked sweetly, her tone laced with calculated innocence.

Dustin let out a faint, bitter laugh. “Is she really worth all that? Why should I apologize to her? Everything she has, all that arrogance—it’s just because she’s Collin’s wife. She’s far more commanding than she was four years ago.”

At that, Joanne’s lips curled with satisfaction. She was quietly pleased that events were unfolding just as she had hoped.

What she failed to realize, however, was that everything—up to this moment and far beyond—had been masterfully orchestrated by Dustin, Linsey, and Collin from the very start.

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Chapter 1107:

Linsey walked beside Dolores, their fingers gently linked, while Collin’s important words echoed in her mind.

Collin had told her, “Look, Joanne is absolutely furious that you’re taking over as CEO of Lawson Group. She’s planning to use the big guns—the Wade family and the Walton family—to get the board members on her side and kick you out. Dustin is going to pretend to fall out with us, okay? He’s going to show just enough softness toward Dolores to make Joanne think she can control him, like she’s got a puppet on a string.”

He had also added, “Tonight, Jeffery and Alicia will be here too. And trust me, Joanne is going to screw something up. Once Hester sees that this whole alliance between the Wade and Walton families is just a play for Joanne to let Jeffery make a ton of cash, this engagement will be over. It’ll be done.”

Linsey took a deep breath, collecting herself, then guided Dolores to a quieter part of the hall, away from the chatter.

As they settled down, she gently lifted Dolores' hand, turning it carefully to inspect it.

"Let me just check your wrist again," Linsey murmured, her voice soft with concern.

Dolores managed a wry smile, shaking her head slightly. "Seriously, I'm fine. It's just a little red, you know? Not even a scratch." She tried to pull her hand away, but Linsey held firm.

Linsey pressed her lips together, then let out a small, indignant snort. "If Joanne had actually dared to hurt you, I swear to God, I would have torn that engagement party apart tonight. I would have made a scene they'd never forget."

Dolores let out a genuine chuckle, and it was like a warm wave washing over her. All those awful feelings—the hurt and disappointment from moments before—just faded away.

She sighed, a deep breath escaping her lips. "It doesn't matter anymore, honestly. Whatever Joanne does next, it has nothing to do with me. I just need to keep my distance from Dustin, you know? From all of them."

After a short pause, her voice dropped to a low whisper. "No matter what, Joanne wouldn't really go too far with me. I mean, I'm not actually tied to Jeffery, after all, am I?"

Linsey looked at Dolores, her gaze full of worry, and spoke slowly, emphasizing each word. "Joanne just humiliated you right there, in front of everyone, showing how audacious she is. Someone as vindictive and manipulative as her? Who the hell knows who she'll decide to target next? She's a viper."

Joanne's blatant actions were one thing, but the fact that Dustin had allowed her to provoke Dolores like that—that was what truly set Linsey's blood boiling. It was infuriating.

The more Linsey thought about it, the more her anger simmered. She had to consciously clench her jaw and take slow breaths, fighting hard to keep herself from glaring across the room at Dustin.

Even though Collin had laid out their entire intricate plan and all the arrangements they had made over the last few days, seeing Dustin just stand there, doing nothing to defend Dolores, still ignited a raw, negative emotion deep within her. It felt like a betrayal.

Linsey genuinely trusted Collin with every fiber of her being. But truthfully, there was no ironclad guarantee that everything Dustin had told Collin was completely accurate. It was a risky game.

After all, Dustin had indeed left CR Corporation—a major move—yet the news hadn't fully spread throughout Grester's high society. The silence on that front felt unsettling.

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Chapter 1108:

"So, listen, Linsey," Dolores murmured, her voice barely a whisper, a frown creasing her brow. "Did Dustin really just walk away from CR Corporation? I'm totally lost about him and Collin. I mean, didn't Collin get a message from Dustin recently?"

Even in that moment, despite everything, Dolores found herself completely bewildered; the entire situation just didn't add up for her. She couldn't grasp why Dustin and Collin had suddenly had such a dramatic falling out.

Linsey, feigning complete ignorance, shrugged her shoulders, her face etched with a seemingly troubled expression. Then she let out a deep, heavy sigh, saying wistfully, "Who knows what's really going on with those two... Dustin probably just hit his limit and couldn't stand working for Collin anymore."

Dolores instinctively opened her mouth, a surge of loyalty making her want to defend Dustin. From her perspective, Dustin wasn't the kind of person who would argue or dwell on such minor wins and losses.

Collin had always been fair with Dustin, leaving no room for resentment or hard feelings.

From Dolores' perspective, after they had spent so many years working side by side, it seemed impossible that Collin and Dustin would have a serious falling out over something trivial.

Linsey caught the flicker of doubt in Dolores' eyes and instantly understood. Playing up her part, Linsey let a spark of irritation color her features and pressed, "What's this? Are you really about to stand up for Dustin now?"

Just as the words left her lips, Linsey spotted a shadowy figure loitering nearby with a glass of champagne in hand—close enough to overhear, yet pretending to be absorbed elsewhere.

A quiet chuckle threatened to escape Linsey. Joanne was indeed cautious, stationing a spy within earshot. She was relieved she hadn't been fully honest with Dolores earlier.

Dolores, after all, was an open book. One slip, and she might reveal something crucial without even realizing it. Years of friendship had taught Linsey that Dolores was not good at concealing her emotions, and she was willing to bet Dustin understood that too—probably why he had kept Dolores in the dark.

With Joanne's watchful eyes nearby, Linsey decided to play along and make her act convincing.

Dolores forced a smile. "Maybe I'm just being foolish. Even now, I can't shake this feeling that something doesn't add up. Dustin's not one to do something like that."

Her gaze met Linsey's, her voice earnest. "I built Davidson Group from scratch, and I've come across my share of snakes. If Dustin were truly untrustworthy, I would never have chosen him."

Linsey's hand closed gently around Dolores'. She wanted nothing more than to reassure her, but with a spy lurking nearby, she kept up the act instead. "Honestly, I think you're letting Dustin pull the wool over your eyes. He didn't even bother speaking up for you earlier. With that kind of silence, don't expect me to go easy on him."

Dolores fell silent for a moment, searching for words that just wouldn't come.

That much, at least, was undeniable.

After a moment's thought, Dolores grabbed the nearest wine glass and tossed back the contents in a single gulp.

Linsey's eyes widened. "Hey, slow down!"

"You've got a point. Maybe I really am losing it. Dustin's about to get engaged, and here I am trying to defend him. Am I crazy?"

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Chapter 1109:

A wry smile crossed Dolores' lips as she shook her head, her eyes bright. "You know what? Tonight, I'm drinking until I forget it all. Tomorrow, I'll wake up, focus on my career, and let no useless man get in the way of my success!"

Dolores emphasized her resolve by finishing off another glass, her face growing noticeably pinker.

Watching her, Linsey let out a quiet sigh and decided not to intervene. After all, the more Dolores played the part of the heartbroken, drunken woman, the more believable it would be for Joanne and her crowd.

At the very least, Dolores could finally let out some of her bottled-up frustration. So Linsey watched in silence as Dolores knocked back glass after glass—seven in total—without missing a beat.

By the time Jeffery and Alicia entered the scene, they found Dolores swaying and flushed, thoroughly tipsy.

"Linsey, what's going on with Dolores?" Alicia asked, holding onto Jeffery for support.

Glancing over, Linsey noticed Alicia's belly had grown, even in just a few days, though she seemed to be doing well otherwise.

“She’s just making the most of the party,” Linsey replied with a noncommittal smile.

Dolores still had some clarity left; she hadn’t quite tipped over into total drunkenness.

As soon as she spotted Jeffery and Alicia, Dolores lit up and waved enthusiastically. “Hey! Want something to drink? It’s actually pretty good.”

Jeffery arched a brow and responded casually, “Nah, I’ve got to look after Alicia. She can’t have any, obviously. We have a baby on board. You enjoy it, though.”

“Go ahead, no one’s gonna fight you for it,” Linsey said as she came over with a small tray of snacks. “Here—try some of these.”

As she fussed over Dolores, Linsey quietly noted that Jeffery and Alicia were still completely in the dark. Neither of them knew about Dolores’ condition or the chaos Joanne had stirred up lately.

Joanne had been all over the place—erratic and messy. There was a real chance Alicia might be her next target.

That thought made Linsey glance over at Alicia. She wanted to say something, just a heads-up. But the person Joanne had sent was clearly listening in, and Linsey knew better than to spill anything with a potential snake in earshot, so she bit her tongue.

After thinking for a moment, she turned to Alicia. “Hey, could you keep an eye on Dolores for me tonight? I’m not sure I can handle her by myself.”

Linsey glanced at Alicia’s growing belly and quickly added, “I’m not asking you to chase her around—just sit next to her. I’ll manage the rest. I’m just scared she’ll bolt if I so much as blink.”

Alicia smiled and was about to speak, but Jeffery jumped in first. “With her being pregnant, it’s a bit much to ask. I’ll help you watch Dolores instead.”

That was honestly the better option. With Jeffery around, Linsey felt confident Joanne wouldn't dare come anywhere near Alicia.

Linsey nodded, her decision made. "Alright then—both of you stay close and don't go wandering off."

Linsey didn't usually ask Jeffery for favors, so when she did, he was bound to say yes without hesitation.

Chapter 1110:

"No big deal. I just wanted Alicia to get some fresh air," Jeffery replied with a smile.

Alicia rested a hand on her belly and smiled. "I've been stuck at home for weeks. It feels so good to be out today."

Linsey glanced at Alicia's belly with a gentle smile. "A short stroll like this is good for you anyway."

While the group chatted in low voices, the host's voice suddenly boomed from the stage speakers, cutting through the background noise.

"Good evening, everyone! Thank you for joining us at tonight's banquet. We're here to celebrate the birthday of Wade Group's heir, Mr. Dustin Wade. And more importantly, his engagement to none other than Ms. Joanne Ellis. Please welcome to the stage Hester Wade, Chairwoman of Wade Group, along with Mr. Wade and Ms. Ellis!"

A round of polite applause filled the hall, but Linsey simply turned her head toward the stage, her expression unreadable—cool, composed, almost too calm.

Jeffery's voice cut in, tinged with faint surprise. "Wait a second. Linsey, wasn't Joanne the friend who showed up with you at the hospital that day?"

Linsey blinked, caught off guard, then turned to look at him. "You remember her?" she asked, eyebrows slightly raised.

After that hospital visit, Joanne had seemed quiet, clearly disappointed that Jeffery hadn't recognized her at all. But the truth was, Jeffery hadn't completely forgotten her. She had left some kind of impression.

Jeffery shrugged, as if it wasn't a big deal. "I've got a decent memory for faces. If someone stands out, I remember them. Simple as that."

Linsey gave a small nod, her eyes drifting for a moment. Maybe Joanne would take some comfort in knowing Jeffery hadn't completely forgotten her.

But the thought barely lasted. Linsey knew better. Joanne didn't just want to be remembered—she wanted to be his wife. That had been her goal from the start.

The moment Joanne discovered Jeffery was already married, something had shifted in her. She wasn't deterred; if anything, she doubled down. She wanted Alicia out of the picture.

Linsey's gaze subtly shifted to Alicia, who was still nibbling on some snacks, completely unaware of the storm brewing beneath the surface.

Linsey was on high alert that evening, juggling Dustin's secret plan while making sure Alicia never ended up alone with Joanne.

Lost in thought, she felt her phone buzzing deep inside her bag. She retrieved it with practiced calm. Sure enough, it was a message from Collin: Dustin has reached an understanding with Joanne.

Linsey instantly knew what that meant—Dustin was putting on an act, pretending to cooperate with Joanne. Their deal was simple: Dustin would try to steer her toward Jeffery, while Joanne would try to engineer some alone time between Dustin and Dolores.

Moments later, her phone lit up again. I'm on my way.

Her face as composed as ever, Linsey texted back, I got it.

By coincidence, both Dolores and Jeffery stood right beside her.

For Dustin's scheme to work, Joanne knew they would need to keep Linsey out of the way, or at least distracted enough not to interfere. Given that Linsey had already refused Joanne's previous partnership offer, Joanne would likely be eager to either steer clear of her or find an excuse to lure her elsewhere.

Up on the stage, Hester had just revealed that Dustin and Joanne were officially engaged, setting their wedding date for exactly one month away.