

Zillionaire 1151

Chapter 1151:

"I'm here," she said, breaking into a sprint without a second thought.

As she ran, her phone buzzed with an incoming call, but in the heat of the moment, she couldn't stop to answer it. Unbeknownst to her, it was Collin trying to reach her.

Linsey raced through the hospital halls toward the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department. Even from a distance, she could hear panicked screams echoing from the examination room.

As she rounded the corner, she saw a crowd gathered at the entrance, their faces etched with fear and concern.

"Has anyone called the police? They need to get here fast!"

"Security's on their way... God, this is horrifying."

"Is that nurse out of her mind? Holding a pregnant woman at knifepoint?"

"I don't think she's even a nurse here. Look, she isn't even wearing an ID badge."

"There's already blood on the woman's neck. If that knife hits an artery, it's over."

"Her pregnancy doesn't seem far along. If something goes wrong, the baby won't make it."

The chaotic murmurs sent a chill through Linsey's heart.

"Excuse me, let me through," she said, her expression grim as she pushed past the onlookers.

Soon, Jeffery's desperate voice cut through the noise.

"Joanne! Drop the knife! What do you think you're doing?!"

As Linsey broke through the crowd, Joanne's raspy voice rang out with chilling clarity.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm here to take Alicia's life."

With that, she pressed the blade tighter against Alicia's neck.

Alicia let out a sharp, strangled cry.

Crimson streaked down her neck, stark against her pale, horrified face. But she couldn't afford to think about the pain. Her arms were locked protectively around her swollen belly, her entire body stiff with fear, every muscle frozen to shield the life within her.

In the dimly lit examination room, the door stood ajar, and a doctor lay unconscious on the floor—Joanne's first victim.

"Joanne, calm down!" Linsey's voice rang out as she rushed to Jeffery's side, her tone taut with urgency.

Her wide, unblinking eyes were fixed on the blade in Joanne's hand—its surface gleaming coldly under the fluorescent light. One careless twitch, and both Alicia and her unborn child could be lost in an instant.

Linsey's temples pounded as a wave of dread surged through her. So Joanne had infiltrated the hospital in disguise. She had posed as a nurse, bided her time, and struck with chilling precision. This wasn't an impulsive act; it was premeditated.

Joanne had crafted her plan after Hester publicly severed her engagement to Dustin. She no longer bothered to hide behind a mask of civility.

“Linsey, you arrived faster than I expected,” she said, arching an eyebrow in faint amusement. Her gaze shifted to Jeffery. “So you were calling Linsey just now. The bond between you two runs deeper than I imagined.”

Chapter 1152:

Jeffery’s eyes were dark as a storm. He stood rigid, fists clenched at his sides, barely holding back the fury boiling within him. One wrong move, and Joanne might snap—might cut the thread of Alicia’s life without hesitation.

He forced a steady breath. Then, his voice low and firm, he said, “Joanne, we can talk this through. Whatever’s going on, we’ll figure it out together. But please, put the knife down.”

Linsey said nothing, her full attention fixed on the trembling blade in Joanne’s grasp. Every nerve in her body was pulled taut, ready to react.

Joanne blinked slowly. For the first time, her eyes shimmered with a fragile spark of hope.

“Really?” she asked, almost girlish, like someone on the verge of believing in an impossible love. “You’ll give me anything?”

Jeffery hesitated—just for a heartbeat. Then he nodded. “Yes. If it’s within my power, I’ll give it to you.”

For a brief moment, Joanne looked as though she might cry. But the fragile illusion shattered as her cold eyes shifted back toward Alicia. Then, her lips curled into a bitter smile.

“You’re lying,” she murmured. Her breath brushed Alicia’s cheek like the whisper of death. “You’re just saying that to protect her.”

Alicia’s body trembled as a cold shiver ran down her spine. Her eyes clamped shut, her breath shallow.

She understood now. All of it. Joanne's obsession with Jeffery hadn't bloomed overnight. It had likely festered for years—silently, secretly—until it twisted into something dangerous. This wasn't love. This was the kind of fixation that devoured everything around it.

Jeffery, too, grasped the depth of Joanne's delusion. And yet, no matter how he tried, he couldn't recall a single meaningful interaction with her. They had barely exchanged more than polite words.

But none of that mattered now. All that mattered was Alicia's life.

"I swear," Jeffery said, his voice unwavering despite the dread crawling up his spine, "no matter what you ask, I'll do everything in my power to make it happen."

He held her gaze, steady and solemn. "And if I'm lying," he added, his voice dropping an octave, "may I never know peace for the rest of my life."

Joanne stood frozen, the impact of those words leaving her momentarily speechless.

Meanwhile, Alicia's eyes flew open wide, tears welling as she fixed her gaze on Jeffery. That glimmer of pain mixed with sadness danced in Alicia's tear-filled stare.

A quick glance at Jeffery gave Linsey her cue, and she stepped forward while Joanne was still rattled.

"Joanne, listen. I know Jeffery. He means what he says. If he's promising you something now, you can trust that he's sincere. Let's all take a breath, sit down, and really talk this through."

Second thoughts crept into Joanne's mind, pulling her into uncertainty. From her point of view, Jeffery was the kind of person who never lied lightly. Sincerity seemed almost certain whenever he spoke with such gravity. A surge of emotion nearly pushed Joanne to share the wish she had kept buried for years.

Suddenly, commanding voices rang out from nearby.

"Everyone stand back! Clear the area!"

Chapter 1153:

Armed police swept in before anyone could process what was happening, their weapons drawn and pointed. Leading the way, the officer fixed his stare on Joanne.

“This is your final warning. Drop the knife! If you hurt the pregnant woman again, I will open fire!”

Every ounce of hesitation drained from Joanne’s face, quickly replaced by bitterness and a twisted sort of amusement. Tears streaked her cheeks as she laughed bitterly.

“So you involved the authorities,” Joanne snapped, glaring at Jeffery. Her voice trembled, raw and broken. “Don’t pretend I can’t see what’s really going on. All of this is for Alicia! You’d throw yourself into danger for her without a second thought!”

Linsey’s pulse stumbled at Joanne’s accusation. She had no idea whether it was her own emergency call or a bystander’s that had brought the officers to the scene. Regret crept into her thoughts, a heaviness settling in her chest. Thinking back, she realized dialing the police so quickly had been hasty. Even if it felt urgent, there might have been a safer way to help Alicia without setting off this...

Chain reaction. Escalating the tension now only made things worse. Joanne, already unstable, seemed ready to snap.

All at once, Linsey’s fears became reality. Joanne, consumed by rage, drew the blade across Alicia’s neck without hesitation.

Shock widened Alicia’s eyes, her pupils shrinking as confusion overtook her. Her strength drained away, and she slumped sideways, collapsing without resistance.

A single, desperate name tore from Jeffery’s throat. “Alicia!”

The scream echoed through the room, shaking Linsey to her core.

Joanne's rage only deepened. With hate twisting her features, she lifted the knife again, aiming for Alicia's stomach. For Joanne, everything came back to loss. Alicia and the unborn child stood in the way of any future with Jeffery, and the pain twisted her soul.

The world seemed to slow for Linsey, her senses narrowing to the chaos unfolding before her. A rush of movement caught her attention—someone lunging forward to intervene.

Suddenly, a gunshot cracked through the room just as the knife tore through flesh. Crying and shouting erupted in the chaos, voices rising, panic spreading all around.

Somehow, above the noise, Linsey noticed the sound of frantic, uneven breathing. It took her a moment to realize Alicia had fallen into her arms, blood seeping from the wound at her neck. Her gaze fluttered open for just a second.

Only a whisper escaped Alicia's lips. "The baby..."

The words barely formed before her eyes slid shut, consciousness slipping away.

"Alicia!" Jeffery's palms slammed against the floor as he crawled toward her, his face ghostly pale, eyes glassy with panic and locked on her crumpled form. "Doctor! Somebody get a doctor! Save her!" he cried out, his voice cracking with anguish, the words raw with desperation.

Linsey stood frozen. It wasn't until her gaze dropped to Jeffery's back that she saw it—the blood-slick handle of a knife still lodged deep between his shoulder blades. His shirt was soaked through, the crimson spreading outward like ink on wet cloth, drop by drop pattering against the floor until a dark, glistening pool formed beneath him.

Chapter 1154:

Just behind him, Joanne lay eerily still, a raw wound splitting open the center of her chest. Her eyes were wide—blank with shock—as if time had shattered around her. She didn't seem to feel the pain. Her lips parted soundlessly, her gaze lingering on Jeffery, not with rage, but with confusion. Why? Why would he risk his life for Alicia?

The chaos blurred until a commanding voice cut through it all. “Step back! Clear the area!” officers barked, forcing the stunned crowd to part. A team of doctors and nurses rushed in with stretchers, the wheels clattering against the tile.

Linsey watched in a haze as Jeffery and Alicia were lifted and hurried away, surrounded by a flurry of frantic hands and urgent voices.

She didn’t follow. She couldn’t move. She just stood there—anchored in place, eyes dull, trying to make sense of the madness that had unfolded in what felt like seconds.

“Linsey!”

Dolores’ voice broke through her haze. She appeared with Dustin and several of his men in tow. She rushed over and wrapped her arms tightly around Linsey, pulling her close. “Hey, are you okay? Linsey...”

Dolores could see her friend was shaken, so she held her close, offering what little warmth she could amidst the unraveling scene.

Dustin’s eyes swept the area, jaw tightening as he took in the aftermath—Joanne’s lifeless body, the blood-streaked floor, the hum of medical personnel working swiftly.

“Everyone not involved, please leave,” an officer barked, corralling the lingering bystanders away.

With no choice, Dolores gently guided Linsey from the scene, Dustin falling in step behind them. They found a bench nearby and collapsed onto it.

Dolores’s eyes drifted to the blood smeared across Linsey’s clothes, and her chest tightened. Quietly, she retrieved a pack of wet wipes from her bag, dabbing at the stains. But the blood had already dried, crusted into the fabric, resisting her efforts.

“It’s okay,” Linsey rasped, breaking the suffocating silence.

Dolores stilled, looking up. Then, after a moment, she nudged Dustin. “Get us some water?”

“Alright.” He turned and walked briskly toward a vending machine down the hall.

When he returned, he handed one bottle to Dolores, who opened it and passed it to Linsey. “Here. Drink something.”

Linsey gave a weak nod. “Okay.” She raised the bottle to her lips and drank—but barely a few sips in, she choked. The water caught in her throat, sending her into a sudden fit of coughing.

“Easy, easy—”

Dolores set the bottle down and rubbed her back gently, trying to steady her. She worriedly searched Linsey’s strained face, hesitating before she finally voiced what had been gnawing at her. “Linsey... I’m sorry. We should’ve kept a closer eye on Joanne.”

Dustin stepped forward, his tone low and grim. “No. This falls on me. I should’ve been more alert. I’ll take full responsibility for what happened to Jeffery and Alicia.”

Linsey clutched her chest, still trying to calm her wheezing. She shook her head slowly, forcing out the words. “No. This wasn’t your fault. It was Joanne’s. She... she couldn’t let go. No matter how many times we warned her, begged her to listen, she just kept slipping further away.”

Chapter 1155:

Her voice came out hoarse, layered with hurt and exhaustion. “I’m just... I’m just scared. For Alicia. For Jeffery. Jeffery might pull through... but Alicia...”

Silence stretched between them before Linsey spoke again, her voice strained with worry. “Alicia is still pregnant, which makes her body more vulnerable right now. There’s a chance she might...” The words died in her throat.

Tears welled in Dolores' eyes as the implications sank in. "None of this should have involved them. They're completely innocent in all this."

Guilt weighed heavily on Dustin's shoulders. "My plan is what prevented me from warning them about Joanne beforehand. I should have seen this coming." Regret carved deep lines across his face as he shook his head. "I should have stationed more people to watch Joanne last night," he muttered, his voice barely audible. "How could I have underestimated just how cunning and ruthless she could be?"

Linsey released a weary sigh. "Dwelling on it won't help anyone now. Joanne is gone, and all we can do is pray that Alicia and Jeffery make it through this nightmare."

Silence fell over them again until Dolores suddenly looked around. "Wait, where's Collin?"

Linsey hesitated, her gaze shifting to Dustin. "I haven't seen him since this morning."

Dustin raised his hands in bewilderment. "I'm just as clueless. Collin hasn't reached out to me at all."

Studying him for several long seconds, Linsey finally spoke. "Honestly, before I knew about your scheme, I was convinced you two had some kind of serious falling out."

A wry smile tugged at Dustin's lips as he scratched his head. "Fall out with Collin? Never. I was simply setting the stage, acting jealous of him on purpose. That performance made it easy for my mother and Joanne to buy into the whole charade at the banquet."

His expression grew serious again. "Still, you should try reaching Collin. He needs to know what happened here."

Linsey's mouth tightened into a thin line. "He's been nowhere to be found all morning. Even if I tell him now, what difference would it make? If Alicia survives this, it'll be because of the medical team fighting to save her life." She pulled out her phone as she spoke.

Ready to give Collin a piece of her mind for disappearing without warning, she stopped short when the screen revealed dozens of missed calls from him.

Linsey stared at the display, uncertainty flooding through her. Turning to Dustin, she asked with growing concern, "Has Collin been trying to reach you too?"

Dustin fumbled for his phone, his face paling as realization hit. "Damn it, my battery died hours ago. I completely forgot to charge it!"

Linsey's gaze shifted to Dolores, the question clear in her eyes. Dolores blinked sheepishly, a hint of embarrassment coloring her cheeks. "I blocked Collin's number ages ago. With everything that's been happening, it completely slipped my mind to unblock him." She tilted her head thoughtfully. "I doubt he'd suddenly call me."

Without a word, Linsey held up her phone screen for Dolores to see. "Apparently, he tried calling you too, but obviously couldn't get through."

Dolores' eyes widened as she took in the long list of missed calls. "Well, that's our Collin for you. Still as persistent as ever when it comes to you."

Chapter 1156:

Linsey's voice carried a bitter edge as she spoke. "He disappeared this morning without so much as a goodbye, ignored my messages completely, and now suddenly he's desperate to reach me."

Her fingers tightened around the phone. "Typical timing, really. Never around when I actually need him."

She looked down at the device, her voice dropping to barely a whisper. "I know it's unfair to blame him for this, but I can't shake the feeling that if he'd been here, maybe Alicia and Jeffery would be safe right now."

Dolores' expression softened with understanding. "Linsey, you should call him back. Dustin and I can go check with the surgical team to see how things are progressing."

"Alright, I'll be there soon," Linsey nodded, her tone calm but her heart far from it.

As she watched Dolores and Dustin walk away, an uneasy feeling churned in her chest. She had thought that after Haven and Kylee were sent to prison, her days of facing life-and-death threats were finally behind her.

And yet, she had just witnessed how those she cared about ended up injured. Clutching her phone tightly, she inhaled deeply to calm her racing mind, then dialed Collin's number.

The call connected almost instantly.

Before she could say a word, Collin's voice came through—hurried, anxious, and laced with worry. "Linsey, where are you? Did something happen? Are you hurt?"

The sound of his voice struck her deeply, her eyes instantly misting with tears. Until that moment, she had braced herself for scolding—for his frustration over her ignoring his calls. But no rebuke came, only concern.

"I'm okay," she replied softly, her voice hoarse and unsteady.

Collin exhaled, clearly relieved, but something in her tone unsettled him.

"You've been crying," he said quietly, almost certain.

Linsey hesitated, torn between denial and honesty. But before she could answer, Collin asked again, more deliberately this time. "You found out, didn't you?"

Her breath caught. "What do you mean by that, Collin?" she asked sharply. His words felt like a breadcrumb trail to something he hadn't yet told her.

There was a pause. Then, in a voice unusually even, he confessed something that left Linsey frozen.

“I had a vasectomy.”

“What?!” The phone nearly slipped from her fingers.

Her thoughts reeled back to the conversation they had shared just last night. “Collin, you—why would you go through with this without telling me first?” she asked, her emotions swirling in confusion and disbelief.

His reply came, calm but resolute. “Because I believe in acting more than explaining.”

He paused, then added with unmistakable sincerity, “I couldn’t bear the thought of you ever going through the pain of childbirth again.”

A storm of emotion welled up inside Linsey. She was touched deeply. And though it shocked her, somehow it didn’t surprise her—not coming from him.

As the reality sank in, Linsey found herself growing calm. In truth, she didn’t want more children either. And when she thought about it rationally, compared to what women endure—the trauma, the pain, the recovery—a vasectomy was a small price for a man to pay. In that light, Collin’s decision didn’t anger her. It touched her. What he had done—without telling her—was born from love, not deception.

Chapter 1157:

And yet, there were more pressing matters now. She had to check on Alicia and Jeffery.

Composing herself, Linsey exhaled softly and said, “I understand. Just text me the hospital and room number. I’ll come see you after I finish up here.”

On the other end, Collin sounded almost wounded. “Honey... what could possibly be more important than me right now?”

But Linsey had no time to soften her words. “Collin,” she said, rising to her feet, her tone suddenly grave, “Alicia and Jeffery were attacked by Joanne. They’re both in surgery.”

She hesitated, then added solemnly, “And... Joanne is dead.”

Outside the operating room, the fluorescent lights flickered gently above. Dolores and Dustin paced the hallway, their worry etched into every movement. Moments later, they looked up to see Linsey approaching—flanked by several doctors in white coats.

“Linsey!” Dolores rushed toward her, eyes full of both relief and concern. But her gaze quickly shifted to the unfamiliar faces behind Linsey. “Who are these people?”

Linsey gave a firm nod to the doctors behind her, and the medical staff stepped forward to swing open the operating room doors. One by one, the surgeons filed in, swiftly changing into their sterile gowns.

The doors hissed shut behind them.

Linsey turned back to Dolores and Dustin to explain. “This is an elite medical team Collin brought in. The lead surgeons are exceptionally qualified, with years of experience. With them handling the operation, Alicia’s chances have risen significantly.”

Dolores and Dustin exchanged wide-eyed glances, their expressions lighting up with hope.

“Really? That’s amazing!” Dolores breathed out, her excitement bubbling over. “Collin’s amazing. How did he pull this off so fast?”

Linsey offered a faint smile but didn’t elaborate. There was more to it—but now wasn’t the time.

In truth, Collin hadn't assembled the team personally this time. His subordinates, always prepared for emergencies during his own procedures, had invited the surgeons to remain on standby. That precaution was now turning out to be a godsend.

Dustin furrowed his brows, blinking as something clicked in his memory. "Wait, I think I recognize some of them. Weren't they stationed overseas recently? When did they even get into Grester? I hadn't heard a thing. If I had, I'd have brought them in myself."

Dolores gave him a light swat on the arm, half-teasing, half-exasperated. "Too late for what-ifs, Dustin. Just focus on making it up to Alicia and Jeffery when they wake up."

Linsey, who had been coiled with tension just moments ago, found herself oddly calm. Maybe it was Collin's unwavering demeanor—or maybe it was the quiet confidence of the team inside—but for the first time since the chaos began, she truly believed things would be alright.

Time drifted on. Outside, the day began to soften into a warm orange hue.

Then, the doors to the operating room swung open.

Chapter 1158:

The trio surged forward. "Doctor—how are they?" Dolores asked.

One of the lead surgeons, still in scrubs, pulled off his mask. "You were lucky. We managed to stop the bleeding in time. The wound on the woman's neck has been treated, and the baby is unharmed. She's stable now, but her condition is delicate. She'll need rest and monitoring."

He glanced toward them again. "As for the male patient, his back wound was deep but not critical. We've stitched him up and stopped the bleeding. Like her, he'll need time—but he's going to be okay."

The breath the three of them had been holding finally escaped in a shared exhale.

Dolores couldn't help the gasp that left her lips. "Thank God they're both safe."

The weight of guilt still lingered in the room—what happened was a consequence none of them had foreseen, and part of them still blamed themselves for not shutting things down with Joanne sooner. But for now, relief won out.

Linsey nodded with quiet gratitude. "Thank you, Doctor, for everything. Truly."

Moments later, Alicia and Jeffery were wheeled out, unconscious but alive.

"We'll arrange a double room for them since they're a couple," one of the nurses offered. "It'll make it easier for the family to be close. This gentleman will likely regain consciousness first. When he does, make sure he knows his wife and baby are safe."

Linsey leaned in with a gentle nod. "We'll tell him. Thank you."

Soon, both patients were settled in a quiet room, side by side.

Dustin, sensing the strain in Linsey's posture and the weariness shadowing Dolores' eyes, decided to head to a nearby eatery to fetch some food for them. They all needed some strength after all—strength to care for Alicia and Jeffery when they came to.

On the walk to the hospital room, Linsey considered for a moment, then pulled out her phone. It was time to inform Myla and Cruz.

The moment she relayed what had happened, Myla almost gasped out of her skin. "What!? Cruz and I are coming now. Stay with them. Keep watch. We'll be there as soon as we can."

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She had never imagined that something so grave could unfold on what had seemed like just another ordinary day.

Sensing the tremor in Myla's voice, Linsey gentled her tone and said reassuringly, "Don't rush. Just be careful on your way. Jeffery and Alicia are still unconscious."

"Okay," Myla replied hastily, her words barely audible over the strained sound of Cruz's anxious voice echoing in the background.

Alicia was pregnant—and quite far along at that. This was the most delicate phase, a time when she needed to be protected, not placed in danger. It was no surprise that today's incident had shaken both Myla and Cruz to the core.

After ending the call, Linsey and Dolores made their way swiftly to the hospital room where Alicia and Jeffery had been admitted.

They approached Alicia's bedside first. There, in the hush of the sterile room, they gazed down at her unconscious form, grief shadowing their eyes. Her face was ghostly pale—drained, almost colorless from the blood she had lost.

A thick bandage wrapped around her slender neck, adding an almost haunting fragility to her stillness.

Dolores's voice trembled with fury and pain. "This is absolutely unforgivable. Alicia was pregnant, and Joanne still did this to her? Thank God the elite medical team got here when they did. I don't even want to imagine what might've happened otherwise."

Chapter 1159:

Linsey lowered her eyes and murmured, "Joanne's hatred has been festering ever since she found out Alicia married Jeffery. She's been spiraling... and today, she finally snapped."

She paused, her gaze distant, a flicker of conflict in her eyes. "Loving someone isn't wrong. But Joanne never once chose the right path. Even knowing Alicia and Jeffery truly loved each other, she confronted Alicia with nothing but spite."

Dolores let out a weary sigh. “Maybe... maybe years of unreturned love twisted into something darker. Obsession.”

Linsey let the thought linger but refused to justify Joanne’s cruelty. “It’s a relief they’re still alive. If something had happened... even Joanne’s death wouldn’t have atoned for what she did.”

To Linsey, anyone who could lift a hand against a pregnant woman—no matter how heartbroken or desperate—had crossed a line far beyond redemption.

Before long, the door opened, and Dustin entered, arms loaded with a large bag of food. Behind him, his subordinates trailed in carrying several bags brimming with daily necessities.

Dolores blinked in surprise. “Why did you bring so much?”

Unfazed, Dustin instructed his men to set the bags on the table and replied matter-of-factly, “They’ll be here for a while. These are the basics—they’ll need them.”

Even Linsey looked mildly taken aback. “Didn’t peg you for the thoughtful type. Impressive.”

A wry smile ghosted across Dustin’s lips. “Well, I have to make sure they’re looked after... until they’re truly okay.”

The gratitude in both women’s eyes didn’t need words.

Just as Dustin reached into the bag to offer each a dish, a sudden cough broke the silence. It came from Jeffery.

His face, already deathly pale, twisted in pain as the cough strained his wounded back.

“Jeffery!” Linsey sprang to her feet. She rushed to his side, bent over him, and gently stroked his hair. “Jeffery, can you hear me? Are you awake?”

Jeffery took a few shallow breaths before his eyes snapped open—wide, wild, and clouded with fear.

For a moment, he stared at the ceiling as if struggling to remember where he was. Then, abruptly, he turned his head toward Linsey.

His first words came out cracked and hoarse. “Alicia... where’s Alicia?”

Jeffery stared at Linsey, visibly unsettled. A vague memory flickered in his mind—just before losing consciousness, he had seen Alicia collapse, blood pouring from her neck in a terrifying torrent. The image had haunted him through fragmented, disoriented dreams.

Noticing his growing distress, Linsey gently shifted to the side, allowing him a clear view of the bed beside him.

Her voice was soft but steady, a balm against the panic in his chest. “Alicia hasn’t regained consciousness yet,” she explained. “But the doctor assured us she’s stable. The baby’s safe too. She’s just extremely weak now and needs lots of rest.”

Jeffery’s eyes remained clouded, as if still caught in the haze of panic. Without hesitation, Linsey reached out and supported his shoulders, propping him up with two soft pillows behind his back.

Chapter 1160:

“See? She’s really okay,” she assured him, hoping to calm his nerves before his worry could overwhelm him again.

Jeffery struggled to sit up fully, and slowly, his blurred vision began to clear. At last, he could make out Alicia lying peacefully in the adjacent hospital bed.

The sight of her safe and breathing brought tears to his eyes.

“Alicia...” he breathed, his voice ragged with relief and anguish.

Gripping the edge of his blanket, Jeffery tried to push himself out of bed. Startled, Linsey quickly held him back. "Your back is still injured—don't strain yourself! You'll reopen the wound."

Jeffery didn't shift his gaze. His eyes were locked on Alicia, as if afraid she might vanish the moment he looked away.

"I just want to be closer to her," he pleaded. "Linsey, please help me over there."

But Linsey shook her head firmly. "No. You can see her from here. If you tear your wound, you'll make things worse—for yourself and for everyone taking care of you."

She paused, then added seriously, "You need to rest and recover. We're already doing everything we can for Alicia. If you push yourself now, we'll have to split our focus, and that helps no one."

Jeffery's breath caught at the logic in her words. After a pause, he finally relented, nodding faintly. "Alright. I'll stay here."

His gaze drifted toward Dolores and Dustin, a weary smile touching his lips. "Why are all of you here? Thank you... for coming."

Dolores quickly waved her hand, flustered. "No—no, this was our fault. Dustin and I should have done more to prevent this from happening."

Jeffery looked confused. "What do you mean?"

Dustin, seated at his bedside, leaned forward slightly, his voice solemn. "We knew Joanne's mental state had become unstable. We planned to monitor her closely last night, but she still managed to escape. She came straight to the hospital... Alicia and you paid the price."

Jeffery's brow furrowed, concern deepening across his face. "But why would Joanne..."

Linsey stepped in, choosing her words carefully. “She claimed to be your junior when you studied abroad.”

Jeffery blinked, then frowned slightly in confusion. “My junior? You mean she studied at my college?”

There was a brief pause before he said plainly, “I’ve never met her before.”

Linsey froze. From Joanne’s own words, she and Jeffery had supposedly known each other during their time overseas. Yet Jeffery’s expression held no recognition, no trace of familiarity.

Linsey slowly realized that Jeffery was telling the truth—he had absolutely no memory of Joanne.

Suddenly, everything Joanne had said felt suspect. Had she fabricated their entire connection in her mind, driven by obsession and insecurity? Was it possible that she had admired him from afar, too afraid to approach him, and created memories to justify the fantasy?

Linsey exhaled softly, her heart tightening with unease.

Now that Joanne was gone, her secrets had died with her—and there would never be a way to truly know the full story.