

Zillionaire 1161

Chapter 1161:

Jeffery's brow furrowed in deep reflection. "I just don't understand why Joanne would suddenly turn against Alicia like that. Thank goodness Alicia made it through."

He turned toward Linsey, his voice growing solemn. "I remember the police arrived in time. Joanne must have been taken into custody, right? I really hope she can come to her senses and stop hurting others. Of course, I'll be hiring a good lawyer—to make sure Alicia gets the justice she deserves."

Linsey cast a glance toward Dolores, hesitating for a brief moment before replying with calm resolve, "There's no need. Joanne is already dead."

A flicker of shock shadowed Jeffery's features. "Dead?" he repeated, stunned.

Linsey nodded slowly. "The police feared she'd try to harm Alicia again. They aimed for her wrist to disarm her—but she moved too erratically. The bullet struck her in the chest. She died on the spot."

A heavy silence fell over the hospital room.

Jeffery's expression turned solemn, complicated emotions flashing in his eyes. "I understand," he finally murmured.

Then, his gaze drifted to Alicia. "But let's not tell her. I'm afraid it would only deepen her trauma. She's already been through too much today."

Linsey nodded in agreement. "You're right. It's better to spare her the pain. She needs rest, not more anguish."

The silence was interrupted by the soft creak of the hospital room door opening.

“Jeffery!” Myla rushed in, her eyes filled with worry. She hurried to his bedside, her voice laced with concern. “How are you? Where are you hurt? Is it serious?”

Cruz followed closely behind her, his expression equally concerned.

Seeing Alicia still unconscious, Myla lowered her voice and asked anxiously, “She hasn’t woken up yet?”

Jeffery met Linsey’s eyes briefly—a silent exchange of understanding passing between them.

“I’m fine, Mom,” he reassured Myla gently. “It’s just a minor injury. Alicia was badly frightened, though. She lost quite a bit of blood. The doctor said she needs time and rest.”

Relieved by his composure, Myla finally relaxed and quietly took a seat at Alicia’s bedside.

Her gaze swept over the woman’s pale face, and her heart clenched. “Alicia still looks so pale... The cut must be deep. It must have hurt so much...” Her voice quivered with emotion. She bit her lip, her eyes suddenly brimming with tears. Her anguish and concern for Alicia were genuine, impossible to hide.

Linsey stood quietly nearby, watching. She couldn’t help but feel a growing sense of doubt about the claims Joanne had made before her death. If Alicia had truly schemed her way into the Lawson family, if she had manipulated or blackmailed them, wouldn’t Myla be the first to resent her? Yet what Linsey saw now was nothing short of maternal affection and sorrow.

While she pondered, Myla addressed Jeffery again in a low voice. “Two years ago, Alicia endured so much just to donate bone marrow to Jeffery. We tried to thank her, to offer her compensation... but she firmly refused. She said it was something she did willingly, and she couldn’t accept a single cent.”

At those words, Linsey’s eyes dimmed slightly, her heart tightening. In that moment, the truth of the past came into clear focus. Joanne had been living in a fantasy—twisting memories and emotions into a story that had never existed.

Chapter 1162:

A sigh escaped her lips, soft and contemplative. Emotion surged in her chest, not just sorrow for what had happened, but also a deeper gratitude for seeing things clearly now. She believed Myla—deeply. A mother who loved her son wouldn't accept just anyone into the family. If Alicia hadn't been genuine, Myla would never have approved of her.

And with that thought, Linsey's mind circled back to something else.

Back when Jeffery had offered to transfer his shares of the Lawson Group to Linsey, Alicia hadn't uttered a single complaint. On the contrary, she had appeared genuinely pleased.

If Alicia had truly been driven by greed, she would never have let Jeffery hand over such significant assets so effortlessly.

As Linsey reflected on this, a soft smile unconsciously curved her lips. Her gaze drifted tenderly to Alicia's sleeping face. Her instincts had been right all along. Alicia was a kind, sincere soul—and it was that quiet goodness that had drawn Linsey to her so naturally.

Suddenly, Alicia's eyelids began to flutter ever so slightly.

"Alicia? Alicia!" Jeffery called out, barely able to contain his excitement. He had been watching her the entire time—even the slightest twitch didn't escape him.

At the sound of his voice, everyone in the room turned their eyes toward Alicia. She slowly opened her eyes, her expression still weak, but her spirit unmistakably present.

She gave a faint smile and whispered teasingly, "You're all so loud... I was planning to sleep a little longer."

Relief washed over the room like a wave. But before anyone could laugh, a low groan escaped Jeffery.

Everyone turned to see him trying to sit up, only to wince sharply as he pulled on the wound on his back.

“Jeffery, what happened?” Alicia tried to turn toward him, but the stiffness in her neck made even that slight motion painful.

Since she was unable to see him, a trace of panic flickered across her face, the smile fading instantly. “Jeffery, are you hurt? I can’t see you...”

Linsey sighed and pressed Jeffery gently back against the bed, her tone part scolding, part affectionate. “Alright, you two need to settle down. One of you has barely woken up and is already panicking. The other is trying to play hero while injured. Honestly, I don’t even know which of you to scold first.”

Both Alicia and Jeffery fell silent, chastened like two misbehaving children.

Jeffery didn’t want Alicia to worry any more than she already had. “I’m fine, I promise,” he said quickly. “But how are you feeling? Are you in pain anywhere?”

Before Alicia could answer, Jeffery tugged lightly at Linsey’s sleeve. “Linsey, could you go get the doctor? I want them to check on Alicia right away.”

Alicia, however, was still unconvinced. “Jeffery, are you really not hurt? If you’re fine, why are you in a hospital bed too?”

She had lost consciousness the moment Jeffery shielded her from Joanne’s blade. She hadn’t seen the blood pouring from his back.

As the two continued to fret over each other, Linsey interjected once again, her tone somewhere between firm and fond. “Alright, enough. Since you’re both awake, I’ll have the doctor come in and examine you. That way, you’ll each get the answers you need—directly from a professional, not each other. Deal?”

Chapter 1163:

At that, Dolores let out a sudden laugh. “Linsey, you sound exactly like a kindergarten teacher.”

Though the comment was aimed at Linsey, it was Alicia who blushed—the sudden heat in her cheeks bringing color to her otherwise pale face.

“Sorry,” Alicia murmured, clearly flustered. “I’m just really anxious. Jeffery’s survived a serious illness, and I’ve been so worried about him...”

Jeffery spoke up instantly, his tone full of quiet reassurance. “I’ve already recovered. There’s nothing wrong with me, truly. You’re the one who needs the attention. You’re carrying our baby—your body’s going through so much more than mine.”

Alicia blinked and spoke in a steady voice. “The first thing I did when I woke up was check on the baby. I know the baby is safe. I can feel it.”

Linsey added her reassurance. “You have great instincts, Alicia. The doctor confirmed the baby is fine, but your body is quite weak, so you really need to take care of yourself.”

Once she finished, Linsey turned to the men Dustin had placed at the door. “Would one of you mind asking the doctor to come here?”

Without saying a word, Dustin suddenly rose from his seat and quickly left the room. “I’ll get the doctor myself.”

Dolores let out a quiet comment. “It looks like he’s genuinely trying to make up for things.”

Raising her eyebrow, Linsey responded, “He might just be doing small favors, but his attitude really is different. I’m beginning to see him in a better light.”

Some of the others looked at each other in confusion, unsure what Linsey and Dolores truly meant.

For Alicia’s sake, everyone chose to steer clear of any talk about Joanne.

Not much time passed before Dustin returned with the doctor in tow.

With a pleased expression, the doctor greeted them. "I see you're both awake. You're looking a bit better already, which tells me you're both in pretty good shape."

Alicia's bedside was the first stop for the doctor. He examined her wound carefully and also checked her general health, along with the baby's condition.

A warm smile crossed Alicia's face as she answered softly, "Jeffery and I make it a point to support each other and live healthy lives, and we've done our best to stick to that."

In the past, Jeffery had faced a serious illness, and after they got married, they both committed to regular exercise. Pregnancy didn't stop Alicia from staying active, as she continued with gentle workouts. That commitment meant her health was stronger than it might seem.

The doctor nodded in approval. "Keeping up those habits is very wise," he said, pulling his hands away. "There's nothing major to be concerned about right now. If you notice you're not hungry, that's completely normal. Just try to eat simple—"

"Nourishing foods that go down easily. Your neck injury could be making it hard to eat."

After finishing with Alicia, the doctor moved on to check on Jeffery.

Since Jeffery's wound was on his back, he had to turn over for the doctor's examination. Jeffery struggled with even the simplest movement, but he pressed on in silence, determined not to let Alicia suspect anything was wrong.

Noticing his efforts, Linsey kept her thoughts to herself and gently helped him shift positions. Off to the side, Myla and Jeffery both watched him, their brows drawn tight with concern.

Chapter 1164:

Since Alicia couldn't see Jeffery herself, she watched Myla closely, reading her expression for any sign of trouble. A worried look from Myla sent a jolt of anxiety through Alicia. "Myla, how is Jeffery? Is his injury really that bad?"

Myla paused for a moment, her eyes darting away without her realizing it, before she rushed to speak. "That is not the case. Jeffery has always been tough. Even with a severe wound, he will recover quickly and be up and moving again in just a few days."

"Is it really that bad?" Alicia's voice trembled as she spoke.

At that moment, the doctor chimed in, "It's not as bad as it seems, but the wound is deep. The blade was small, yet it cut with enough force to leave a mark. The stitches are holding well, and since the weather is cool, healing will come along in time. There's no need to worry too much."

After a short pause, the doctor addressed Jeffery more seriously. "I do need to tell you, though, wounds on the back often scar more easily. You can use some scar cream later on, but the mark may not go away completely."

Jeffery answered right away, "I'm not bothered about a scar on me. What about Alicia's? She's always cared about her looks."

A flush crept up Alicia's cheeks, and she blurted out, "Jeffery, stop saying things like that."

Completely unfazed, the doctor continued his work. "Her neck injury isn't deep at all, and the stitches were done with care. If she keeps the area clean, the scar will fade over time."

This prompted Linsey to remember something. "Jeffery, there's something I should mention. Your injury wasn't stitched up by this doctor. Compared to Alicia's, your scar might look a little crooked."

Hearing that, Alicia couldn't help but burst out laughing, though she tried her best not to move too much and aggravate her wound.

“Linsey, I’ll admit, I was worried my scar would end up looking terrible. But hearing you and the doctor reassure me, I feel a lot better. Thank you both,” Alicia said, her cheeks still tinged with color.

Appearance had started to matter more to her, just as Jeffery had pointed out. In the past, Alicia hadn’t paid much attention to such things, but since meeting Jeffery, she had grown a little more particular and softer in her habits.

Once the doctor finished up, he wasted no time leaving the room. His words had spread a sense of relief throughout the group.

Their conversation turned casual, and out of nowhere, Jeffery asked, “Linsey, have you seen Collin? It’s odd. He’s usually always nearby, but I haven’t seen him today.”

That single question drew everyone’s attention to Linsey, catching her off guard. As she sat in silence, Jeffery narrowed his eyes in suspicion. “Is something wrong? Did Collin do something to upset you?”

The moment he said that, the Lawsons’ faces shifted.

Myla let out a frustrated sigh. “You two just remarried, didn’t you? Don’t tell me Collin’s caused trouble again.”

Even Cruz, who had kept quiet until now, spoke up with concern. “If Collin’s giving you grief, just let us know, Linsey. We’ll be right here for you.”

Alicia’s brow furrowed as well, and she said gently, “Linsey, you and Collin seemed happy at the banquet last night. Did something happen between you?”

With questions coming from every side, Linsey found herself unable to get a word in.

Chapter 1165:

Dolores and Dustin traded looks, both appearing confused, and suspicion crept in that Collin might have truly upset Linsey.

After all, for Collin to organize a first-rate medical team, he must have known exactly what was happening in the hospital. In the old days, Collin would have been right there by Linsey's side, always stepping in whenever she needed help.

Yet, hours had passed since everything happened, and Collin still hadn't shown up. Nobody could ignore how strange that was.

Dolores leaned in closer, dropping her voice to a whisper. "Linsey, did something happen between you and Collin?"

Memories of seeing a string of missed calls from Collin on Linsey's phone were still fresh in Dolores' mind. Linsey had called him back later, but she never found out what was said. That left her wondering if Linsey was really upset with Collin this time. With that in mind, Dolores felt more justified about keeping Collin blocked for now.

"You're all letting your imaginations run wild," Linsey replied with a sigh. "No, there's been no fight. Collin and I are perfectly fine."

A brief pause came as Linsey looked away for a second. "Something urgent came up for him, that's all. He couldn't make it."

Watching her closely, Jeffery picked up on her discomfort right away. "You don't need to hide anything, Linsey. If Collin has done you wrong, I promise I won't let it slide!" he remarked, his tone full of resolve, as though he were ready to take action against Collin that instant.

Linsey broke into laughter, gently patting the blanket over Jeffery and playfully saying, "Right now, you're the one who's hurt. Focus on healing before you think about anyone else."

Giving him a teasing glance, she added with a smile, "Besides, you don't even have a role in the Lawson Group anymore. At best, you're a Lawson. What could you possibly do to Collin? I'd probably do a better job handling him myself."

Jeffery didn't take Linsey's teasing to heart. He tightened his fists and announced, "I'll challenge Collin head-on."

Waiting for a beat, he continued in a serious tone, "Just let my back heal first."

A small sigh left Linsey as she tried to be as vague as possible. "Honestly, nothing happened between me and Collin. There's nothing to worry about. Collin had a minor surgery this morning. He's staying at the hospital for observation, so he couldn't be here."

Surprise swept through the room. "Surgery?"

Dustin's eyes went wide with disbelief as he blurted out, "What kind of surgery did Collin need? How come nobody told me? I can't believe he kept something this important from me!"

Linsey explained, "It really was just a minor procedure. I only found out about it myself. You've had your hands full lately, so Collin probably didn't want to bother you."

Luckily, Dustin didn't get stuck on the issue. He jumped to his feet, determined to check in on Collin. "No way. I've got to see for myself. What kind of surgery did he need? Is he alright?"

Dolores raised her eyebrows and gave Dustin a look. "Didn't you say you'd stay here to look after Jeffery and Alicia? Are you really planning to leave right now?"

After hearing her, Dustin stopped in his tracks and sat right back down. "You're right. I should stay here."

Chapter 1166:

A second later, he whipped out his phone and began typing. "I'll just send Collin a message to see how he's doing."

Linsey had the urge to stop him, but Dustin's fingers flew across the screen and he sent the message before she could react.

With nothing left to do, Linsey quietly tucked away her concerns and tried to act like nothing was wrong.

Myla remarked gently, "That's alright, Mr. Wade. We're managing things just fine here."

She had no idea that Joanne was involved in Jeffery's and Alicia's injuries. In her mind, Dustin was simply being thoughtful by staying to help care for them. "All of you have your own responsibilities. There's no need to trouble yourselves with looking after them here. If it comes to that, we can always hire professional caregivers."

A moment passed before Linsey responded in a calm voice. "I've already arranged for two caregivers to look after Jeffery and Alicia. Dustin can stay if he wants to lend a hand, and if he needs to handle something else, he's free to go. Besides, Collin truly is alright."

Right after Linsey finished speaking, her phone lit up with a new message. When she checked her screen, she saw a text from Collin: "Did you tell Dustin about my vasectomy?"

Accusation lingered in the message.

Linsey replied without delay. "All I said was you had a minor surgery. Don't go blaming me for anything."

With the message sent, she slipped her phone out of sight.

Not long after, Dustin received a message from Collin as well.

Dustin glanced at his phone, then announced clearly, "Collin said it was just a small surgery, and he'll be leaving the hospital tonight."

Dolores interjected, "So it really wasn't anything major. You should just stay here, Dustin. You're needed more at the hospital."

Everyone knew they had promised Jeffery they would stay, and that wasn't something they would break lightly. Linsey nodded in agreement. "Exactly."

"Linsey, since Collin also had surgery and he's still in the hospital, why don't you go check on him? There are plenty of us here to help," Myla suggested, her expression softening after learning there was no fight between Linsey and Collin.

She believed couples ought to look out for each other. If the roles were reversed, and Linsey was the one in the hospital, Collin wouldn't think twice about being by her side.

Jeffery listened but kept his thoughts to himself.

Alicia, now feeling much stronger, said softly, "Linsey, you should go ahead. Don't worry about us. Please thank Mr. Riley for me and Jeffery. If he hadn't brought in the best medical team, I might still be out cold."

She hadn't forgotten how, years ago, Jeffery had hurt Linsey more than once because of Carol. Most people would never have forgiven what the Lawson family did, but Linsey had still chosen to help them, putting the past aside.

Even after Jeffery transferred company shares and the president title to Linsey, Alicia sometimes felt it still wasn't enough to make things right. Linsey deserved to be treasured and shown true respect.

As she thought of all this, Alicia's eyes grew even warmer as she looked at Linsey. Her words to Linsey came with a sense of real friendship, not just family ties.

Chapter 1167:

When she caught the kindness in Alicia's gaze, Linsey's heart softened. A genuine smile spread across her face as she nodded. "I'll check in on Collin now and come back tonight to see both of you again."

Jeffery arched an eyebrow and responded, "That's not necessary. Just stop by when you have the time. The Lawson Group still needs you, and I don't want you running yourself ragged."

Standing up, Linsey reached for her bag, then waved and spoke as she headed out. "How could I do any less? You're my family. I'll always look out for you."

She left the room with a gentle goodbye, quietly closing the hospital door behind her.

A heavy silence lingered in the room for a long time after she was gone. Dolores turned her gaze toward the Lawsons, quietly taking in the look of surprise etched on each of their faces.

Tears welled up in Myla's eyes as she was the first to react, gripping Cruz's hand with trembling fingers. "Cruz, did you hear that? Linsey called us her family. She is willing to accept us. She truly means it!"

Emotion showed in Cruz's usually calm face, and his eyes grew damp. After taking a steadying breath, he gave Myla's hand a gentle squeeze and finally replied, "Yes, I heard her."

For several moments, Jeffery lay in stunned silence, unable to look away from the door. A raspy whisper left him as he murmured, "Linsey, thank you."

A sincere smile appeared on Alicia's face. "Linsey is truly amazing. Being part of her family is something to be grateful for."

Taking Alicia's hand, Dolores smiled warmly and spoke in a serious tone. "Linsey doesn't just think of you as family. She sees you as a friend too. That's why she was so anxious about you today."

A rush of memories flooded Alicia's mind, carrying her back to that morning. She vividly recalled the moment when Linsey had come running in while Joanne stood there threatening her with a knife. She remembered the worry in Linsey's eyes, the way her face reflected true fear for her safety.

No one could fake such emotion at a time like that. Those memories convinced Alicia that Linsey's concern was genuine. Thinking about all of it brought a rush of emotion, and a single tear escaped down Alicia's cheek before Dolores noticed.

A look of surprise crossed Dolores's face. "Alicia, what's got you crying?"

Dolores quickly reached for a tissue, dabbing Alicia's cheek before any tears could run down and risk irritating her neck wound.

Worried glances came from everyone else in the hospital room as they watched Alicia.

Trying to lighten the mood, Alicia gave a shy smile. "I just feel really fortunate. Linsey is so kind, and so are you and Mr. Wade. You've helped Jeffery and me more than I can say."

Hearing that left Dolores feeling a bit awkward, since she and Dustin hadn't prevented today's trouble, yet Alicia was still offering thanks.

"Come on now, we're all friends here. There's no need for so many thanks," Dolores responded gently. "Linsey already said you're all family, and in a family, there's no place for formalities."

Looking over to Dustin for support, Dolores asked, "Isn't that right, Dustin?"

Dustin agreed immediately. "Of course, you're absolutely right. We're all so close, there's no reason to stand on ceremony," he said, waving for his men to bring over the food from the table. "Let's all eat and have a good talk. Alicia, Jeffery, I hope you both stay cheerful and get better soon."

Chapter 1168:

Elsewhere, Linsey made her way down the hall to Collin's hospital room. A glance told her the door wasn't shut all the way.

Pausing at the threshold, she heard a familiar voice float out from inside. "You brat! You kept everything so secret, I was terrified you needed emergency surgery. You nearly scared me out of my wits!"

Collin let out a sigh. “Grandma, you’re really making this a big deal. My staff just made it sound worse than it was. It was only a small operation.”

For a moment, Linsey stood frozen by the door, surprised to find Ivy already there.

Nerves fluttered in her chest. She had planned to visit Ivy together with Collin later, not like this.

While she wondered whether to step inside, Ivy suddenly brought up her name. Ivy fixed Collin with a stern look. “This surgery was something you really needed. Think about it. Linsey left Grester years ago, pregnant and all alone, and she had to raise two children without you there. If your grandfather had left me in that situation, I—”

“Would have held a grudge for years!” A small smile tugged at Linsey’s lips as she listened from outside.

Suddenly, a tightness settled in her throat, the emotion catching her by surprise. Earlier, she had felt a little left out after hearing that Haven often visited Ivy and that Ivy was on friendly terms with Carly. For a while, Linsey had even wondered if Ivy liked Haven more than her.

But now, it was clear that Ivy’s heart still held her close.

Collin’s apology came out in a soft, genuine voice. “I’m sorry, Grandma. I was in the wrong, and I’m trying everything I can to make it up to Linsey. This surgery is just something I needed to do for her.”

Sincerity filled his tone, and even from the hallway, Linsey could sense how much he meant every word.

Relief softened Ivy’s expression at last. “That’s the attitude I want to see. Start treating Linsey right from now on. You can’t let history repeat itself.”

A solemn promise followed. “I won’t let you down, Grandma. With you watching over me, I’ll never make the same mistake again. I’ve already told Linsey I won’t keep secrets from her anymore.”

That response drew a smile from Ivy and nearly made Linsey burst out laughing where she stood.

A hush fell over the room until Collin added, lowering his voice in a secretive tone, "There is one thing, Grandma. I need to tell you a secret, but you have to help me keep it from Linsey for a while."

Those words made Linsey's smile disappear, her heart thumping with sudden anxiety.

A sinking feeling took over as she realized Collin might be hiding something from her again.

She raised her voice and snapped, "Weren't you just saying you wouldn't keep anything from Linsey anymore? Why are you backpedaling again?!"

"No, Grandma, please listen to me..." Collin tried to explain.

Tension and worry flickered across Linsey's face as she absorbed their heated conversation. A firm resolve settled in her mind. If Collin had really deceived her again, she would never forgive him.

The weight of that possibility made Linsey grip the doorknob tightly.

Chapter 1169:

A passing nurse noticed her and approached with curiosity. "Ma'am, is there something you need? Do you know the patient in this room?"

The unexpected voice made Linsey whirl around to face the nurse. Recognition lit up the nurse's features before Linsey could respond. She blurted out excitedly, "Oh, I know who you are! You're the famous designer, Linsey!"

Uncomfortable heat crept up Linsey's neck at the sudden attention.

“I’m a huge fan of yours! You look even more beautiful and elegant in person than in the photos online!” Admiration sparkled in the nurse’s eyes as she gazed at Linsey, her hand twitching as if ready to produce pen and paper for an autograph.

“Thank you.” A strained smile tugged at Linsey’s lips. “Thank you for your support.”

The nurse completely missed Linsey’s discomfort, her gaze shifting to the room number. Sudden realization dawned on her face.

Her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. “I remember now, the patient in this room is Mr. Riley. You two are married! I thought you were eavesdropping at the door, but it seems I misunderstood.”

Nervous laughter bubbled from Linsey’s throat. “No, no, I wasn’t eavesdropping.”

The door beside them swung open at that precise moment, and Linsey’s head turned to meet Ivy’s bright, joyful eyes.

“Linsey! You’re here!” Warmth radiated from Ivy as she grasped Linsey’s hand, pulling her inside with gentle insistence. “Why are you standing at the door? Come in.”

Sensing the intimate family moment unfolding, the nurse said tactfully, “I should go back to work now.”

Before she could resist, Linsey found herself swept into Collin’s hospital room by Ivy’s firm guidance.

“Linsey, it’s so wonderful to see you again. It’s been ages, and I’ve really missed you,” Ivy beamed, steering Linsey toward the plush sofa positioned by the window.

Deliberately, Linsey kept her gaze fixed anywhere but on Collin throughout their reunion. Heat prickled along her skin as she felt an intense stare boring into her, but she masterfully ignored it, channeling all her attention into Ivy’s loving words.

“Ivy, I feel the same. I’ve missed you too.”

Guilt crept into Linsey's voice as she paused, then continued apologetically, "I'm sorry, Ivy. Since returning to Grester, I haven't had the time to visit you. That's my fault. I was just thinking of visiting you soon, but here we are today."

Dismissive warmth filled Ivy's immediate response. "Linsey, there's no need for such formalities between us. I know you guys are busy. I'm happy as long as you have time to chat with me."

Ivy's weathered hands clasped Linsey's as she released a soft sigh, her voice dropping to a more serious register. "Actually, if anyone should apologize, it's..."

Shock flashed across Linsey's features at those unexpected words, her hand instinctively waving in protest. "There's absolutely no need for you to apologize." Never had she expected Collin's grandmother to offer her an apology.

"Five years ago, when you married Collin, I helped that rascal hide his identity from you. I never told you, and in a way, I was an accomplice to the deception." Ivy's words came slowly, each syllable weighted with genuine remorse as her eyes searched Linsey's face. "You suffered so much, raising two kids all by yourself overseas. It breaks my heart."

Those heartfelt words echoed what Linsey had overheard at the door moments earlier. As she was face-to-face with Ivy now, the sincerity of her affection felt even more overwhelming.

Chapter 1170:

Swallowing the knot of emotions threatening to surface, Linsey managed to speak. "Ivy, it's not your fault. I've never blamed you. You've always been so kind to me, and I can feel that."

Collin's brow furrowed involuntarily at Linsey's carefully chosen words. Her meaning rang crystal clear. All the blame rested squarely on his shoulders. She had every reason to blame him.

His heart clenched as he sensed that she seemed mad at him.

Ivy's eyes softened as she looked Linsey over. "It makes me happy to hear that." She reached out to gently smooth Linsey's hair, her voice filled with tenderness. "You look so much thinner than before. These past five years must have been hard on you."

A small shake of the head was Linsey's response. "Honestly, it hasn't been that difficult for me."

Oddly enough, more than one person had commented on her slimmer appearance since coming back, as if she must have suffered through endless hardships while she was away. At first, Linsey sometimes did feel sorry for herself. Her time abroad had been challenging, and she tried not to trouble Gorman, choosing instead to handle most things on her own. Thankfully, Zenia and Zander had been understanding children. Once she made it through those early nights of no sleep, looking after them grew much easier. Ivy's words now left Linsey feeling a gentle warmth inside.

Without missing a beat, Linsey switched topics. "Ivy, I haven't brought Zenia and Zander over to see you yet."

A bright laugh came from Ivy. "There's no rush. You've always been a wonderful girl, and I just know your children must be clever and polite. I can't wait to finally meet my precious grandchildren."

Conversation filled the next half hour, with Linsey focusing her attention on Ivy and never glancing Collin's way. That was all the proof Collin needed to realize Linsey was upset with him. Why she was so unhappy, he still couldn't figure out. He knew he would have to wait until they were alone to ask her about it.

A quiet yawn from Ivy broke up their talk as she started to feel the weight of the evening, a reminder of her habit of turning in early.

Linsey noticed right away and suggested softly, "Ivy, it's getting late. Why don't I drive you home so you can rest?"

That was all it took for Collin to finally lose his composure. "Grandma, did you not arrive here in a car?"

Linsey came to a halt, turning her head just enough to give Collin a cold, uninterested look.

Collin sat there in silence, the uneasy feeling in his chest growing with each passing second.

Catching on to Collin's motives right away, Ivy teased him with a knowing smile. "You're so transparent, Collin. I can see exactly what you're after. You just want to spend some time alone with Linsey."

After saying that, she rose from her chair, her expression warm and understanding. "The two of you really do need some privacy. I'll let you have this time together."

As Ivy made her way toward the door, Linsey stood as well, ready to walk out with her.

Suddenly, Ivy paused and gently reached for Linsey's hand, her voice taking on a serious tone. "Linsey, before I go, there's something I want to make clear." That caught Linsey off guard, and her mind instantly went to the secret Collin had hinted at earlier.