

Zillionaire 1181

Chapter 1181:

Even though he wasn't standing, the strength and authority he radiated were impossible to ignore. In a heartbeat, the bride, groom, and every guest found themselves focused on the newcomer.

A murmur spread through the guests. Someone gasped, recognizing him instantly.

"Hey, isn't that Collin?"

"Who's Collin?" another whispered.

"You really haven't heard? That's Collin Riley! The neglected son of the Riley family."

As realization dawned, the tension in the room thickened.

"So that's him!" someone else exclaimed.

Collin's story was practically a legend in the city. Rumor had it his mother died the day he was born, and his father wasted no time remarrying. A car crash later left Collin unable to walk, and from then on, his presence in the Riley family faded into the background. His father's new wife soon had a son of her own, pushing Collin even further aside in the Riley family hierarchy.

If his grandmother hadn't stood up for him time and again, Collin would have been thrown out of the Riley family ages ago, forced to scrape by with even less than a beggar.

As soon as people realized it was Collin, several guests shot him looks of contempt and sneered.

"What's he doing here?"

"I heard he was supposed to get married today, too. But word is, his fiancée bailed because she couldn't handle marrying a man in a wheelchair."

The gossip swept through the chapel, and even those at the altar couldn't help but overhear. Linsey listened to the whispers, her heart aching for Collin. In a way, both of them had suffered at the hands of their own families.

As the noise faded, Collin scanned the room and then fixed his gaze right on Linsey. Without hesitation, he pointed at her and announced, "She's coming with me."

"Right away, sir!" Immediately, his men in black made a beeline for Linsey, ready to take her away.

She stepped back, walking a few steps and trying to shield herself. "What's going on? Stay back!"

Linsey turned her gaze to Collin, her voice trembling but firm. "Mr. Riley, what are you trying to do?"

Collin arched an eyebrow, his tone sharp. "Since my fiancée chose to run off, you will be my bride as her replacement. Finish this wedding by my side!"

Collin's words fell, sending the entire room into chaos.

Linsey's eyes went wide with shock. "Ridiculous! Your bride ran away—what does that have to do with me? I won't marry you. I have someone I love!" she snapped back furiously.

Her refusal rang clear, yet Collin's expression never wavered. The black-suited bodyguards moved forward with grim determination.

Against a group of trained men, one woman stood little chance. The odds were stacked impossibly high.

Panic seized Linsey as rough hands reached for her. She caught sight of Felix and called out desperately for help. "Felix, help—"

Chapter 1182:

Reality crashed over Felix like cold water. He lunged forward, rage blazing in his voice as he shouted at Collin. "You deranged cripple! How dare you pull such a crazy stunt right in front of everyone!"

His voice cracked with fury. "I'm the one who's supposed to marry Linsey!" Without hesitation, he charged straight at Collin.

Swift as shadows, the bodyguards intercepted him. They seized his arms and drove a brutal kick into his ribs, sending him crashing to the floor.

"Felix!" Horror filled Linsey's scream as she fought against her captors, desperate to reach him. "Are you okay?"

Pain wracked Felix's body as he lay sprawled on the cold marble. Every breath felt like fire, and words refused to come. Heartbreak consumed Linsey completely.

She rose to her feet, fury blazing in her eyes. "You villain, I will never marry you!"

"Is it because of him?" Collin drew a gun with casual ease, his smile never faltering. "If he were dead, would you agree to a different groom?"

Ice flooded Linsey's veins at those words.

Felix believed it was all an empty threat. Fighting through the agony, he struggled to his feet and glared defiantly. "Who do you think you are? If you dare..."

His words died unfinished. Thunder cracked through the air as Collin's gun roared, sending a shot straight into the ceiling above.

Screams erupted from the terrified guests as they clutched their heads and scrambled for the exits in pure panic.

Fear turned Felix's legs to jelly, and he collapsed back to the floor. The next instant, Collin leveled the smoking barrel directly at Felix's forehead. A wicked smile spread across his lips.

"Please don't kill me!" Terror finally convinced Felix that Collin meant business. His voice broke as he begged for mercy.

"Don't shoot!" Desperation drove Linsey forward without thought. She threw herself in front of Felix, her teeth clenched as the words tore from her throat. "Collin, if you promise not to hurt Felix, I'll marry you!"

Those words made Collin's eyebrow arch with interest. Surprise flickered across his face. Linsey appeared so fragile, yet she showed no fear of his weapon.

Since she offered to negotiate, he saw no reason to refuse her terms. After all, marriage was his only goal—something to satisfy Ivy's demands. Taking a life would only complicate matters unnecessarily.

Decision made, Collin gestured to his men surrounding Felix. "Let him go." The black-suited bodyguards stepped back instantly, forming two perfect lines.

Relief flooded through Linsey as she turned to help Felix to his feet. What she didn't expect was for him to scramble away from her in terror.

"Felix! Felix!" Alarm filled her voice as she called after him.

But no matter how desperately she called, Felix acted as though he couldn't hear her. He fled without a single backward glance. Within moments, he had vanished completely from sight.

Linsey stood frozen in place, ice spreading through her veins. They had promised to face everything together, yet when it mattered most, he abandoned her without a second thought.

Shock held Linsey captive as she stared at the empty space where Felix had disappeared. Her mind reeled in complete confusion.

Just then, a cruel voice cut through her daze. "This is the groom you wanted to protect? Doesn't seem like much of a man."

Chapter 1183:

Linsey spun around, fury blazing in her eyes as she glared at him. "If it weren't for you, I would have married Felix by now! A monster like you deserves to be crippled, and it's no wonder your bride chose to abandon you!"

Linsey's words struck the bodyguards like lightning, their eyes widening in stunned disbelief. Not one of them could fathom that she had actually dared to strike Collin's deepest wound, seemingly courting death itself.

Darkness consumed Collin's expression completely, his piercing gaze locking onto her with an aura that could freeze blood in veins. "Say that again if you dare."

Ice flooded Linsey's veins at his glacial tone, tremors cascading through her entire frame. Every fiber of her being screamed that her words had ignited Collin's fury. This madman would show no mercy, and survival meant groveling for forgiveness. Yet, even though she knew this truth, pride refused to let her surrender, a cold sneer twisting her lips. "Did I say anything wrong?"

Predictably, Collin's gun materialized in his hand, the barrel trained directly on her heart. Dangerous fire flickered in his narrowed eyes as cruel laughter escaped his throat. "Do you really think I won't dare to kill you? Women line up begging to marry me."

"Then go ahead and kill me." Defiance blazed in Linsey's raised chin as scornful laughter bubbled from her lips. "Anyway, it's better than marrying a monster like you."

Collin found himself genuinely surprised by Linsey's fearless display. Felix had abandoned her without a second thought, yet here she stood, willing to sacrifice her life defending such a worthless man.

Bewilderment washed over Collin as he struggled to decide whether her courage deserved admiration or her foolishness warranted mockery.

Frost practically radiated from Collin's very presence. Every witness held their breath, certain they were about to see blood spilled—even Linsey herself accepted her fate. White knuckles gripped the delicate fabric of her wedding gown as cold sweat pooled in her trembling palms. Despair settled like lead in her chest as she steeled herself for the inevitable.

Against all expectations, Collin's finger never found the trigger. Instead, his hand lifted slowly, tucking the weapon away with deliberate calm.

Shock rippled through Linsey at this unexpected mercy. "You're not going to kill me?"

Disbelief clouded her thoughts—surely a devil like him wouldn't spare her without reason.

Cruel laughter shattered her brief hope as Collin's lips curved into a chilling sneer. "Letting you off the hook so easily would be too kind. Making your life a living hell sounds far more entertaining."

"You—" Fury ignited in Linsey's trembling frame, her mind reeling as he still refused to release her from this nightmare.

Collin dismissed her outrage entirely, his attention shifting to his waiting men.

"Go fetch the priest to officiate the wedding."

"Yes, sir."

Swift as shadows, the bodyguards dragged the cowering priest from his corner hiding spot, their silent threats more persuasive than any words. Terror paralyzed the holy man, leaving him no choice but compliance as he resumed the ceremony with shaking hands.

Chapter 1184:

“Collin Riley, do you take Linsey Brooks as your lawful wedded wife, to love, comfort, honor, and protect her, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, and forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?”

Mockery dripped from Collin’s voice as he answered without a trace of sincerity. “Yes, I do.”

“Very well.” Nervous sweat beaded on the priest’s trembling forehead as he dabbed it away.

Following the sacred ritual despite its twisted circumstances, he turned his attention to Linsey. “Linsey Brooks, do you take Collin Riley as your lawful wedded husband, to love, comfort, honor, and protect him, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, and forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?”

White-knuckled fists trembled at Linsey’s sides as she forced the words through gritted teeth. “Yes, I do.”

Sacred vows spoken under the priest’s quavering voice, witnessed by stone-faced bodyguards, sealed their unholy union.

Bitter tears blurred Linsey’s vision as she stood frozen in place, her heart heavy with crushing defeat.

This morning had dawned with such promise—her wedding day with Felix, a celebration she had dreamed of for months.

Instead, fate had bound her to this cold-hearted devil named Collin.

Linsey drew in a slow breath, doing her best to suppress the surge of bitterness rising inside her. Now that the deal was done, she had no reason to stay a minute longer. Finding Felix was her top priority.

Without glancing back, Linsey gathered her skirt and headed for the door. Collin’s voice cut through the air behind her.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

She snapped back, defensive and cold, “Home, of course. Where else?”

But Collin had other ideas. “You’re my wife now, at least in the eyes of the law. There’s no reason for you to go back to your old place. Come with me.”

Once again, Linsey found herself completely thrown off by this infuriating man. She barely knew him. Fifteen minutes ago, she was about to marry someone she had loved for years. This stranger had shattered her wedding and was demanding she move in with him as if it were nothing.

Never in her life had someone left her this agitated, her whole body trembling with anger. Each breath was a struggle, and it felt like she might just fall apart. Swallowing her tears, Linsey squared her shoulders and glared at him with red-rimmed eyes.

“I agreed to marry you, but don’t push your luck. I refuse to live under the same roof as you,” she declared with unwavering determination. Right then, she turned around, striding out without looking back.

Collin remained relaxed, lounging in his wheelchair, clearly in no rush to stop her.

But Linsey hadn’t made it far before two bodyguards stepped into her path. She tried moving left; they blocked her. She shifted right; they shadowed her every move. There was no getting past them.

“Out of my way,” Linsey snapped, her glare sharp enough to cut glass.

The guards stood their ground, silent and unmoving.

Chapter 1185:

Her voice rose, brittle with anger. “I’m warning you. Let me through!” But there wasn’t a flicker of response.

With her patience gone, Linsey threw herself at them, trying to shove her way past.

They didn't budge an inch—solid as boulders.

Meanwhile, Linsey's own desperation mounted, sweat trickling down her face as her efforts proved useless. Finally, fed up and breathless, she turned back toward Collin, fury burning in her eyes. Her voice came out in a tremulous shout.

"You're insane! What exactly do you want from me?"

Collin barely flinched at her outburst, giving her a long, judging look before letting out a low, humorless laugh.

"You know exactly what I want from you."

Linsey's frustration spilled over. "I told you, I'm not about to move in with some lunatic!"

Her voice wavered with emotion, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I already have someone! Isn't it bad enough you forced your way into my wedding? Now you want to control every part of my life too? How can you be so heartless?"

Collin, unfazed by the barrage of insults, simply lounged in his chair, his hands relaxed but his presence undeniably commanding. Not even a flicker of shame crossed his face.

He answered with chilling certainty, "You should be grateful. That so-called fiancé of yours left you to fend for yourself the moment things got tough. If I hadn't stepped in, you'd still be blind to who he really is."

"You—" Linsey's head pounded with rage, her finger shaking as she tried, and failed, to protest.

Collin only seemed more amused by her flushed, tearful face. Without warning, he reached out and pulled her into his embrace.

His abrupt move left Linsey utterly stunned. A startled gasp slipped from her lips as she lost her footing, her arms instinctively wrapping around his neck for support.

Linsey barely had time to react before Collin's hand swept softly across her cheek, lingering longer than necessary. The velvet edge in his voice sent a shiver down her spine. "Why waste your sorrow on a man who isn't worth a second glance? What exactly are you clinging to? Huh? Someone like me could treat you far better than he ever did."

A resounding smack echoed through the room as Linsey's palm met his face, snapping his head to the side and painting a harsh red streak across his cheekbone.

Startled gasps broke from the bodyguards. "Mr. Riley!" Disbelief colored every word.

He paid his men no mind, cold fury swirling in his eyes as he locked his gaze on her.

A heartbeat later, his grip closed around her neck, voice turning low and dangerous. "You dare lay a hand on me?"

Linsey choked for air, her features twisting in pain, her hands clawing frantically at his wrist.

Wrenching herself free at last, she skipped the chance to breathe and shoved against his chest, scrambling upright and stumbling backward several paces. Not until she had put a safe gap between them did she meet his glare, her own gaze blazing with defiance, no trace of fear—just pure, unfiltered fury.

Chapter 1186:

"You're insane," she retorted, her voice raw with emotion, chest rising and falling, tears streaming unchecked. "Frankly, a slap is getting off easy."

No words escaped Collin, his gaze locked on her with a look impossible to decipher.

A heavy, suffocating silence pressed in on the room.

Linsey saw no point in dragging the confrontation out any longer. Escape was still on her mind, but the bodyguards formed an unyielding wall, refusing her passage.

On the edge of panic, she lunged for a bodyguard's holster, snatching the weapon and raising it to her own head.

"Move aside," Linsey scoffed through trembling breaths, tears glistening in her eyes but her posture unyielding. "One more step and I'll end this right now!"

Shock rippled through everyone except Collin, who remained in his wheelchair, coolly observing her with a strange hint of amusement.

The gun shook in her grasp, the trembling a dead giveaway—she didn't truly want her life to end, only hoped the threat would force his hand. For someone terrified of dying, she had been willing to risk everything for Felix—someone Collin deemed utterly worthless. Her loyalty to that man over him piqued his interest.

A faint, cold smile curved his lips, and something fierce flashed in his eyes.

"Let her go," he instructed, his voice low but commanding.

Relief swept through Linsey as Collin finally relented.

The weapon slipped from her grasp, and her skirt gathered in her hands as she dashed from the room, panic urging her onward.

Collin's voice rang out, clipped and heavy with intent. "Linsey."

The sound rooted her to the spot, anxiety coiling tight in her chest. Every instinct screamed that he might go back on his word, trapping her after. She stood there, frozen, unable to summon the courage to face him.

Eyes never leaving her retreating form, Collin spoke in a voice that brooked no argument. “You’ll come back to me, begging.”

That sentence made her glance over her shoulder, just once.

Ridiculous.

She would have to be utterly deranged to ever return to him.

Even so, she kept the thought to herself. A man as unpredictable as Collin wasn’t someone to antagonize—she knew better than to risk his temper and jeopardize her escape.

With that, Linsey gathered herself, bottled up every stray emotion, and quietly slipped away.

Once she stepped out of the church, Linsey’s first instinct was to reach for her phone and try Felix’s number. Three attempts later, the call still went unanswered.

A crease formed between her brows as she muttered under her breath, “Why won’t he answer? Did something go wrong?”

After a few moments of troubled thought, she waved down a taxi and slid inside.

“Starwood,” she said to the driver, determination lacing her voice.

The ride sped by, and before Linsey knew it, the car pulled up to her destination in just under thirty minutes. After settling the fare, she stepped out, brushing off the curious stares from nearby residents, and hurried across the lobby—her wedding gown drawing even more attention. The elevator doors slid shut behind her, carrying her upward.

Chapter 1187:

Starwood, renowned for its luxury and reputation, had always been a symbol of dreams for her. Back when she still believed in a future with Felix, she had emptied her savings to purchase this place, hoping to turn it into their shared home.

Fingers trembling, Linsey punched in the passcode and pushed the door open. Her voice echoed through the condo as she called out, nerves on edge, "Felix? Are you here? Felix?"

A sultry voice drifted out from the bedroom, its tone unmistakable. "Mmrn... Stop teasing..."

The sound rooted Linsey to the floor, her wide eyes drawn straight to the closed bedroom door, shock freezing her in place. Confusion and disbelief warred inside her. Why would a woman's voice be coming from their condo? And why did it sound so much like Joanna? Joanna—Felix's so-called childhood friend—had always hovered at the edges of their relationship.

Over the five years she had spent with Felix, arguments between them were rare, except for one persistent cause: Joanna.

No one could match Joanna's talent for playing the innocent. She wore her sweet, harmless mask for Felix but never missed a chance to needle Linsey when his back was turned. Every special date, from birthdays to anniversaries, became another excuse for Joanna to insert herself, either dragging Felix away or insisting on being involved in their plans.

More than once, Linsey had voiced her suspicion that Joanna harbored feelings for Felix, gently urging him to keep some healthy distance. Yet Felix always brushed her off, dismissing her worries as unfounded and insisting that Joanna was nothing more than a cherished friend.

Thoughts swirling, Linsey pressed closer to the bedroom door and twisted the handle with a shaky hand.

A familiar silhouette met her eyes the moment the door swung open. Felix sat right there, perched on the edge of the bed.

Memories of those suggestive sounds echoed in Linsey's mind, and a faint pallor crept across her cheeks. Her voice faltered, raw and accusing. "What's going on here?"

Felix looked up at last, surprise flickering across his features. Rising, he tried to explain, "I hurt myself, and Joanna just happened to be nearby. She was helping me take care of it. That's all."

Linsey's eyes snapped to Joanna, searching for any hint of innocence. Clad in a fiery red dress that hugged every curve, her makeup flawless and inviting, Joanna sat with an almost hypnotic allure. A cotton swab and a bottle of iodine dangled from her fingertips.

Their eyes locked, but before Linsey could say a word, Felix turned to Joanna, his tone suddenly dismissive. "Joanna, now that Linsey's here, you don't need to stay. Thanks for the help—you can go home."

Reluctance flickered in Joanna's eyes, but she kept her tone agreeable. "Fine, I'll go."

She set the swab and iodine aside, then let her fingers glide slowly through her tousled hair, smoothing it as a subtle fragrance lingered in her wake.

The soft scent caught Felix's attention, and for a moment, he couldn't help but watch her, his gaze lingering, throat tightening.

Pausing at the threshold, Joanna glanced over her shoulder, catching the look Felix gave her. A playful smile curled her lips as their eyes met in silent understanding.

Chapter 1188:

A moment later, she slipped from the room, leaving Linsey and Felix in uneasy silence.

Without wasting words, Linsey confronted him, saying, "I could hear Joanna's voice through the door."

Felix feigned confusion, eyebrows lifting. "Voice? What are you talking about?"

"There were... moans," Linsey said, her voice low and strained. "She—"

Felix interjected with a half-laugh, shaking his head. "You're imagining things. Joanna wouldn't be making noises like that in our room."

Uncertainty flickered across Linsey's face. "But—"

Felix cut her off, his voice turning unyielding. "You must've heard rumors by now. Haven't I told you time and again not to jump to conclusions? Joanna's nothing more than a friend. She was just helping me with my wound. That's all." A touch of exasperation colored his words as he finished.

Noticing the irritation in his voice, Linsey let the matter drop and tried a different question. "So why didn't you answer when I called you earlier?"

Confusion briefly clouded Felix's features. "You called? Maybe my phone was on silent. I didn't notice it at all."

Almost on cue, the phone on the nightstand began to ring and ring.

A frown creased Linsey's brow as she glanced toward the sound.

Felix seethed silently at the untimely ringing of his phone and hurried to add, "I need to answer this call right now."

Before Linsey could get another word out, he leaned forward and swiftly extended his arm past her to snatch the phone resting on the bedside table. The display showed his secretary's name, so Felix wasted no time answering.

"What is it?"

Moments later, his entire expression darkened. “Come again? What did you just say?”

Updates loaded at g@Inoveℓs.com

Linsey’s concern grew as she watched him field the call.

No sooner had he hung up than she leaned in, worry in her eyes. “Is something wrong at the company?”

Tension weighed heavily in Felix’s reply. “The land in the northern suburb—someone just snatched it away from us.”

The shock on Linsey’s face was impossible to miss.

That particular property had been locked down ages ago. She couldn’t imagine how they could lose it now.

As anxiety churned inside her, Collin’s mocking voice seemed to echo in her head. “You’ll come back to me, begging.”

Dread crept in. Was Collin behind this sudden disaster?

Before she could work through the possibility, her phone started ringing. An unfamiliar number flashed on Linsey’s screen.

A strange intuition tugged at her, and one name rose instantly to mind. That suspicion was confirmed as soon as she picked up. Collin’s voice, light and mocking, came through the line.

“Did your hopeless boyfriend mention the land yet?”

Linsey’s anger surged. “So you’re the one who did this?”

A lazy chuckle drifted across the connection, Collin admitting without a hint of shame, "That's right. It was all me."

Chapter 1189:

Felix seemed to catch on, lunging for her phone and snapping, "Who are you? Why would you deliberately sabotage my deal?"

Calm as ever, Collin's response on the other end left Felix speechless. The call was over in seconds.

Afterward, Felix dropped the phone onto the bed. Linsey, on edge, pressed for answers. "What did he say, Felix?"

Running a hand over his tired face, Felix finally answered, "Collin said you're his wife now. As far as he's concerned, if we want that land back, you have to live with him, not me."

Those words sent a chill racing down Linsey's spine. Never had she imagined Collin would stoop so low, using this scheme to force her into his home.

Fighting back her panic, Linsey tried to steady herself. Clinging to Felix's arm, she tried to sound confident. "Don't panic. There must be another way."

But Felix pulled away, frustration etched across his features. "We're out of time. That land needs to be secured by tomorrow morning. If we miss the deadline, the losses will be enormous."

A desperate idea sparked in Linsey's mind. "How much are we short? Maybe I can cover it."

Felix lifted three fingers. "\$3 million. That's what it'll take."

"\$3 million?!" Linsey's eyes went wide, shock flooding her features. There was no way she could scrape together that much cash right now.

A weary sigh slipped from Felix as he tried to reason with her. "Linsey, maybe it's best if you just go along with what Collin wants."

She spun to face him, disbelief etched into every word. "Are you serious? I'm your girlfriend, and you're telling me to move in with another man?"

Felix wrapped an arm around her, trying to soothe her nerves. "What choice do we have? Don't worry about it—I can accept this, at least until the land deal is done. As soon as it's settled, I'll come back for you."

"But—" Linsey started, her voice small and uncertain.

Felix interjected, impatience flickering across his face. "Would you really let me lose everything without lifting a finger?"

The next morning, sunlight spilled across the upper floor of Vista Villa. Collin stood at the window in his second-floor study, the usual pretense of disability abandoned as he gazed out at the grounds. A figure appeared at the edge of his vision.

Linsey approached, dressed in simple jeans and a white T-shirt, her hair pulled into a loose bun, a suitcase trailing behind her.

Her once gentle features were now marred by a frown and visible anxiety. Collin watched the scene unfold, a glass of wine turning lazily in his hand, a faint and knowing smile curving his lips.

She had once vowed never to set foot in his house, yet here she was, crossing the very threshold she swore to avoid. Collin found it almost amusing—Linsey really did have a knack for breaking her own promises.

With a spark of triumph, Collin finished his wine in one swallow, then settled back into his wheelchair, preparing to greet his reluctant houseguest.

Outside, Linsey hovered by the front door, her resolve flickering. She lifted her hand to ring the bell, then let it fall, hesitating again and again.

Being forced to marry Collin on what should have been her wedding day to Felix had already felt like a nightmare. Now, Collin had gone so far as to threaten Felix's entire future just to get her under his roof.

Chapter 1190:

Felix's desperate plea for help echoed in her ears, the weight of it making it hard to breathe. Determined to endure, Linsey told herself she could put up with anything—just until Felix's crisis passed. Once his company was safe, she would break free of Collin for good.

Clinging to that thought, she steadied herself and reached once more for the bell.

Before she could touch it, the door swung open on its own.

"Ah!" The sudden movement made her jump, the suitcase nearly slipping from her grasp.

"Lingering outside—what are you up to, casing the place for a heist?" Collin's voice drifted out, laced with dry humor as he rolled into view.

Yesterday's formal wedding attire had vanished. Instead, he wore comfortable loungewear that softened his appearance, trading sharp edges for a relaxed, understated charisma.

When she saw Collin at the doorway, Linsey's gaze sharpened, wary and guarded.

His teasing didn't go unanswered. "Who's the thief here? Not me," she retorted.

Collin kept his tone even. "If that's true, why'd you linger out front so long?"

Linsey opened her mouth to fire off another retort, but her thoughts snagged on something unspoken, and the words faded.

A moment later, she threw him a glare, putting on her fiercest face as she snapped, "Stealing from you would be letting you off easy. I ought to rig your house with landmines and blow you to bits, you menace!"

But no matter how hard she tried, her gentle features just made the threat look more adorable than menacing—a kitten baring its fangs.

Collin noticed, a hint of amusement glinting in his eye as he glanced at her luggage. "Is that so? You'll need a stockpile, then. I've got nine lives, and I don't go down easy. But if I ever do, you can be sure I'll be dragging you with me."

"You—" Speech failed Linsey, frustration etched across her features as she stared helplessly at Collin.

A lazy smile played on Collin's lips as he turned back, his voice casual. "Feel free to roll your suitcase in, even if it's packed with explosives."

Drawing a steadying breath, Linsey made up her mind to let his nonsense slide—it was too early in the day to be rattled by him. A silent pep talk helped her swallow the annoyance as she hauled her suitcase inside.

The second she stepped past the doorway, her eyes widened at the villa's stunning interior.

Space stretched out before her, every inch dripping with opulence. The brilliance of the crystal chandelier, elaborate carvings on the walls, and the unmistakable craftsmanship of the furnishings spoke volumes about the owner's fortune.

Letting go of her suitcase, Linsey let out an involuntary gasp.

Catching her reaction, Collin let out a quiet laugh. "What's this? First time seeing a bit of class, you country bumpkin?"

Those words reached her sharp ears, and she spun around with a glare. "Did you just insult me?"

Collin only lifted a brow, looking perfectly at ease. "You must have misheard."

Indignation colored her voice. "I'm certain you called me a country bumpkin!"

Unruffled, Collin shrugged off the accusation. "That never happened."