

Zillionaire 1191

Chapter 1191:

Not for a second did Linsey buy his flimsy denial.

A retort was already forming on her lips when Collin chimed in, “Your room’s upstairs, second door on the left. Drop your suitcase off and come eat.”

Yesterday, she had been too unsettled by the thought of sharing a house with a stranger to touch her dinner, and this morning she had run out the door without so much as a bite. By now, hunger was definitely gnawing at her.

Instead of picking another fight, Linsey decided food came first. She grudgingly followed his directions and started dragging her suitcase toward the stairs.

There wasn’t much in the way of clothing packed, but the suitcase’s real weight came from a stash of secret weapons hidden inside.

Lugging the thing was no small feat—usually, even lifting a bucket of water was a challenge for her, and now she was wrestling an overloaded suitcase up a flight of stairs.

Stuck on the fourth step, Linsey planted her hands on her hips and puffed out a breath, calling out, “Collin—”

Collin didn’t move an inch, still comfortably settled in his seat.

Her call finally drew his gaze, and for a moment, their eyes locked from across the room.

His voice was cool, unreadable. “What is it?”

With an exasperated gesture, Linsey pointed to the suitcase by her side. “I can’t carry it up.”

He didn't so much as blink, the indifference clear in his answer. "And?"

Though her pride protested, Linsey recognized she was out of options and would have to ask for his help. She swallowed hard, gathering her nerve. "Would you mind helping me carry this upstairs?"

Collin's laughter filled the room almost instantly, the easy charm of his smile momentarily throwing her off.

His next words, dripping with sarcasm, jolted her back to earth. "Seriously? You expect a man in a wheelchair to lug your suitcase up the stairs? Use your head."

Reality returned in a rush, and Linsey pinched the bridge of her nose, exasperated. Clearly, her earlier anger had made her forget about his condition.

"Whatever," she muttered, letting out a heavy sigh, resigned to do things herself.

After catching her breath, Linsey rubbed her hands together, squared her shoulders, and braced herself for the lift—determined as any Olympic contender.

Slowly, the suitcase began to inch upward.

Right as she nearly made it to the next step, the wheels wobbled and caught on the edge. The metal handle slid out of her grip, and the heavy suitcase crashed down the stairs with a thunderous noise. Linsey barely had time to react.

The suitcase's weight dragged her off balance, and before she knew it, she was tumbling down the steps right behind it.

"Help—" A startled plea burst from Linsey as she squeezed her eyes shut, her voice trembling in a brief cry.

Disaster felt inevitable—she braced for the worst.

Out of nowhere, sturdy arms caught her mid-fall, locking gently around her waist and pulling her safely close.

For a breathless instant, everything held still.

No sharp pain arrived; instead, Linsey was enveloped in a clean mix of cedar and cool mint. Awareness swept through her, sending a delicate flutter through her lashes. Blinking in surprise, she looked up and found Collin's steady gaze fixed on her, the moment stealing her breath.

Chapter 1192:

It genuinely never crossed her mind that he would be the one to break her fall. The spell barely settled before Collin's quiet voice cut through.

"Are you planning to melt in my arms all morning?"

Color surged to Linsey's cheeks as embarrassment snapped her back to the present.

Flustered, she managed a quick apology and slipped out of his hold, making sure not to meet his eyes.

Whatever words Collin might have said next died on his lips when he noticed the toppled suitcase, a crease appearing between his brows.

Meanwhile, Linsey, oblivious to his irritation, busied herself gathering her scattered belongings, crouched by the battered case.

Clothes and belongings tumbled out across the floor—her suitcase, once neatly packed, had burst open in the chaos.

A new idea took shape. If hauling the whole thing upstairs was impossible, she might as well split up the load and take several trips.

Resolved, Linsey scooped up an armful of items and started for the stairs.

Before she could move, Collin's voice cut through.

"Hold up."

Curiosity and irritation mingled as she halted. "What is it now?"

He pointed directly at the bundle clutched to her chest, his look sharp and suspicious. "What exactly have you wrapped up in those clothes?"

Instinct kicked in. Linsey took a defensive step back, eyes wide with alarm. "It's none of your concern."

Those hidden parcels were her own carefully guarded secrets—her weapons, tucked away last night. No way was she letting him see them.

Collin ignored her protest, his tone cold and absolute. "Give them to me. I want to see for myself."

Rather than give in, Linsey clutched her things even closer, suspicion flickering in her gaze as she kept her eyes fixed on him. Every inch of her posture radiated stubborn refusal—she wasn't about to let him see what she was hiding.

As he saw her resistance, Collin's patience ran thin. He pulled out his phone and made a show of it, his voice full of threat. "Maybe it's time for the Wells Group to close its doors for good."

"Stop!" Fear overtook Linsey's expression as she lunged forward, thrusting the bundled items at him in a rush. "Take them. Just promise me you won't touch Felix's business!"

That was enough for Collin, who tucked away his phone and began peeling back layers of clothing to see what she had tried to hide.

The contents were almost laughable—just a pair of pepper spray canisters, meant for personal safety.

Curiosity piqued, Collin rolled his wheelchair closer to where her suitcase lay. The previous chaos had been covered up by two of Linsey's jackets, an attempt at quick concealment.

Alarm bells rang in Linsey's mind, and she reached out, trying to intercept him. She was too late.

Even as her warning started to form, Collin had already tossed aside the jackets.

Staring down into the opened suitcase, he discovered more than just a few shirts—there were ten pepper spray canisters, half a dozen stun batons, three collapsible nightsticks, six portable alarms, and a single, hefty dumbbell. What he had assumed to be heavy from clothing alone turned out to be an arsenal. A short, incredulous laugh escaped him.

Chapter 1193:

Collin's eyes narrowed as he leveled her with a sharp look. "Tell me, Linsey—exactly who are you planning to battle with all this gear?"

With her defenses already exposed, Linsey saw no reason to lie to him. She moved forward decisively, snatching the two pepper spray canisters from Collin's hands. "They're for protection against you. Who else would they be for?" Her heart belonged to someone else, and sharing a home with Collin was a desperate necessity, not a choice.

To her, he was an erratic presence, and to protect herself from any inappropriate advances during their forced living arrangement, she had taken precautions.

Collin's eyes narrowed, his irritation clear at her bluntness. His voice turned icy as he ordered, "I'm your husband. Why would you need to protect yourself from me? Get rid of them."

"You're not," Linsey shot back, her refined features set in a defiant expression.

Collin's face darkened further. "Repeat that."

Linsey didn't hesitate, her voice firm as she stressed each word. "You are not my husband. Felix is the man I want to spend my life with!"

For reasons he couldn't fully understand, hearing Felix's name ignited a spark of rage in Collin. To him, Felix was utterly worthless, yet Linsey still yearned for him.

Watching her lips form those words, Collin felt an overwhelming urge to silence her.

"If it weren't for you, Felix and I would be happily married by now. We..." Before she could finish, Collin yanked her into his embrace. In an instant, he leaned down and pressed his lips to hers with forceful intensity.

"Mmph..." Linsey's eyes widened in shock. She fought back fiercely, but her struggles only made Collin tighten his hold, kissing her with a ferocity that stole her breath.

The overpowering kiss left her gasping, nearly suffocating. In desperation, Linsey bit down on his tongue.

Collin groaned in pain, loosening his grip. The sharp taste of blood filled his mouth.

Seizing the moment, Linsey broke free and scrambled to her feet. In a flash, she slapped him across the face, her body trembling with fury. "You creep! That was my first kiss!"

Linsey, deeply traditional, had always planned to save her first kiss and her first night for her wedding. During her five-year relationship with Felix, they had never crossed that boundary. But now, Collin had stolen that moment from her.

The more she dwelled on it, the more her anger surged, a part of her wanting to lash out at this despicable man. She raised her hand again, but Collin was quick, catching her wrist mid-swing. In one swift motion, he pulled her back into his arms, his strong fingers tilting her chin to force her gaze to meet his.

Her anger was palpable, but his was fiercer, his eyes cold with a possessive edge. "This is your only warning. We're married now. You're mine, and only mine. If I hear you say Felix is the man you want to marry again, I'll end him right in front of you," Collin warned.

Linsey stared at him, her face pale with shock.

"Do you understand?" Collin demanded, unwilling to let her evade a clear response.

Overwhelmed and intimidated, Linsey reluctantly nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. "I understand."

At that, Collin's expression softened slightly. He ran his thumb over her lips, a faint note of satisfaction in his deep, commanding voice. "That's my girl."

Chapter 1194:

Linsey recoiled from his touch, uncomfortable with any closeness. She pushed him away gently, searching for an excuse to escape. "Can I go upstairs to sort my things?"

"Of course," Collin replied, his mood noticeably lighter. But he wasn't done.

"On one condition—get rid of that stuff. We don't need that kind of thing between us," he added firmly, pointing at the self-defense items.

"But—" Holding onto those things was what Linsey wanted. Any protest died on her lips when Collin's expression darkened, leaving her to swallow her disappointment. "Alright."

Once she finished disposing of the items, a heavy mood followed her as she made her way upstairs, suitcase trailing behind.

Up on the second floor, the bedroom awaited. Linsey crossed the threshold, not sparing a glance for the elegant décor. Her suitcase thudded lightly as she dropped it, and she made a beeline for the bed, settling on its edge.

Earlier memories crowded her mind, and the weight of her grievances pressed in all at once. Questions plagued her: what twist of fate had brought her into the path of someone as unfeeling and ruthless as Collin?

Trying to steady herself, she reminded her heart that if she could just endure a bit longer, Felix would surely appear and free her from all this. That thought helped her regain composure, and she soon began straightening up her things.

Suddenly, the sound of the door swinging open broke her concentration. Seeing Collin in the doorway made her tense up immediately, all her walls snapping back into place. "What do you want now?"

Collin's reply came without hesitation. "This is my room. Why wouldn't I be here?"

Confusion colored her voice as she scoffed, "Your room? That can't be right. This is supposed to be—"

Her words stalled as she glanced around, realization dawning on her face. Signs of Collin were everywhere: an ashtray sat on the nightstand, men's clothing hung neatly in the wardrobe, and every corner spoke of his presence. Spinning around, Linsey stared at him in disbelief. "You mean we're sharing this?"

"Of course," Collin replied, his tone unflinching. "If we aren't sharing a bed, what's the point of calling it living together?"

Shock left Linsey frozen for a moment, but she quickly retorted, "That's not happening!"

"And why not?" A cold edge crept into Collin's gaze.

Felix nearly slipped from Linsey's lips. "Because... I care about someone else..." Her words faded when Collin's intense eyes met hers, silencing her before she could go on.

Feigning indifference, Collin pulled out his phone and acted as if he were about to make a call.

Panic set in for Linsey. She recognized this tactic—he would threaten her with Felix’s company again.

Realizing she had little choice, Linsey caved in before he could follow through. “Alright, I get it.”

A trace of approval flickered across Collin’s face as he set his phone down. With a nod toward the wardrobe, he instructed, “Hang your clothes in here with mine.”

Left without any other option, Linsey did as she was told.

Once she had finished, Linsey got ready to follow him downstairs.

Chapter 1195:

A sudden thought struck her as they reached the landing. “Hold on.” The words made Collin halt his motorized wheelchair, his expression unreadable as he looked at her.

Confusion furrowed Linsey’s brow as she gestured at the wheelchair. “How did you even make it up here?”

“There.” Collin lifted his chin, gesturing in the direction he wanted her to notice. Turning to see what he meant, Linsey caught sight of an elevator nestled on the right side of the hall.

“What?” Stunned, she stood there for a moment. “You actually have an elevator inside your house?”

Collin didn’t miss a beat. “Don’t tell me you don’t have one at yours,” he said, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

Even so, Linsey struggled to process it. “Why didn’t you say anything about the elevator before now?”

Had she known about the elevator, Linsey never would have wrestled her suitcase up the steps, risking a tumble on the way.

Calm as ever under her glare, Collin answered, “You never thought to ask.”

“You—” Frustration made Linsey’s fists tighten, her anger leaving her momentarily speechless.

Truthfully, Collin had planned to mention the lift when she nearly fell down the stairs. The sight of her self-defense gear tucked inside the suitcase, however, stirred his temper, and he had let her struggle up the stairs as a quiet lesson. Not giving Linsey a chance to argue, Collin rolled away and headed straight for the elevator.

“What a jerk.” Linsey snapped back to reality, fury rising as she glared at Collin’s retreating figure and muttered curses under her breath. Now she understood perfectly why his bride had bolted on their wedding day. Living with someone like him felt like courting disaster. She worried she might actually die from pure frustration.

The elevator chimed softly, its doors gliding open with mechanical precision. Collin glanced back at her, his voice carrying that familiar chill. “Aren’t you coming?”

Downstairs, after all the chaos, hunger gnawed at Linsey’s stomach with relentless persistence. But when she reached the dining table, nothing greeted her except polished wood.

Confusion flickered across her face. “Weren’t we supposed to have a meal? Where’s the food?”

Collin stated this like it was obvious. “If you cook, then we’ll have food, won’t we?”

“Me, cook?” Linsey jabbed a finger at her chest, disbelief written across her features.

Collin shrugged with infuriating logic. “I can’t cook. If you don’t do it, who will?”

“Don’t you have any servants?” Linsey demanded.

“I did, but I fired them all because they weren’t doing a good job.”

Linsey found herself completely speechless.

Accepting her grim fate, she dragged herself into the kitchen. It was spotlessly clean, and the fridge was completely empty.

She rolled her eyes skyward, feeling even more exasperated than before. Cooking would take forever, and with her stomach practically eating itself, she decided to order food delivery instead.

Chapter 1196:

Barely moments after placing her order, the doorbell chimed. Could the delivery really be this fast?

Surprise and excitement bubbled up as Linsey rushed to answer the door. But standing there wasn’t a delivery person. Instead, an elderly gentleman waited patiently at the threshold.

Linsey blinked in surprise, then offered a polite smile. “Excuse me, may I ask your name and who you’re looking for?”

The man didn’t respond immediately. His keen eyes studied her from head to toe before finally settling on her face with quiet assessment.

After this careful examination, he introduced himself. “I am the personal butler of Ivy Riley, Mr. Riley’s grandmother. I’m here to discuss matters with Mr. Riley.”

Linsey nodded with understanding and stepped aside gracefully. “He’s in the study upstairs.”

“Thank you.” Roland inclined his head respectfully and made his way upstairs without further assistance.

Linsey felt no curiosity about whatever business the butler had with Collin and settled onto the sofa to wait for her food delivery.

While she was waiting, her thoughts naturally drifted to Felix. She wondered what he was doing right now and how things were progressing at the company.

Eventually, she reached for her phone and dialed Felix’s familiar number. After what felt like an eternity, the call finally connected.

Linsey’s eyes lit up with genuine joy. “Felix...”

Before another word could escape her lips, a woman’s sultry voice cut through the line. “Felix, who are you talking to?”

Linsey’s expression froze completely, confusion washing over her features. Joanna? Why were they together again?

Silence stretched across the line like a taut wire.

When Felix finally spoke, Joanna’s voice had mysteriously vanished from the background.

“What’s the matter?” His tone carried an unmistakable chill.

Linsey jolted back to the present, forcing brightness into her voice. “I just missed you.”

After explaining her reason for calling, she straightened in her seat, anxiety creeping into her words. “Felix, I heard Joanna’s voice just now. What’s going on with you two?”

Felix clicked his tongue in obvious irritation, recognizing her suspicion immediately. “Joanna wasn’t feeling well, so I came to check on her.”

Linsey’s brows knitted together at his explanation. “But aren’t you really busy with work? She—”

“Enough.” Felix’s sharp interruption sliced through her words, impatience bleeding into every syllable. “I know what I’m doing. I don’t need you telling me how to handle things.”

The reprimand struck Linsey like a physical blow, leaving her chest tight with hurt.

Before she could gather herself to respond, Felix delivered his final verdict with brutal efficiency. “Don’t call me unless it’s important. I’m busy. I’ll come to you when I’m free.”

The line went dead with a harsh click.

Chapter 1197:

In the intimacy of the master bedroom once shared by Linsey and Felix, a troubling scene unfolded.

Joanna, draped in a silk nightgown taken from Linsey’s wardrobe, had deliberately left the top buttons undone, revealing the enticing curve of her chest. The fabric clung to her skin like a second layer, sensual and provocative. She knelt between Felix’s legs, her manicured fingers toying with his zipper, her demeanor betraying no hint of illness or restraint—only a calculated, sultry hunger.

“So, are you really planning to bring Linsey back?” she asked, her voice honeyed with mock concern.

Felix gave a low chuckle, stroking her cheek with deliberate ease. “Of course not. I was only playing her. Do you really think I’d let her return? She’s living with another man now. If that gets out, what will happen to my reputation?” He scoffed. “Collin clearly has a thing for her, so let him take her. Frankly, she was always too stiff. All those years together, and she never let me lay a finger on her.”

His tone darkened with bitterness. After all, hadn't she been the reason Collin had targeted his company in the first place? The memory stung. And the resentment festered.

Joanna, hearing his resentment, let a sly smile curve her lips.

"If Linsey couldn't satisfy you..." she purred, slowly pulling down the zipper with practiced ease. Her breath was warm against his skin. "Then let me take care of that for you."

Meanwhile, at Vista Villa, Linsey sat alone at the dining table, mechanically picking at the food she had ordered.

Her appetite had vanished after that call with Felix. The dishes, beautifully plated, now tasted of ash. Her thoughts spiraled, weighted with unease.

Suddenly, a gunshot shattered the stillness. The sound cut through the silence like a knife. Linsey jolted in her seat, the fork and knife clattering onto the floor as her breath caught in her throat.

A sharp spike of fear shot through her. Why would there be gunfire upstairs?

For a moment, she sat frozen, unsure of what to do. But after a few deep breaths, she pushed her chair back.

The legs scraped harshly against the polished floor, echoing through the stillness and making her wince. She hesitated—should she go see what had happened? Her feet itched to move, but fear rooted her in place.

Before she could decide, the elevator door slid open. Collin emerged, seated in his wheelchair. He looked lethal, stone-faced, and unreadable. Behind him stood the butler Ivy had sent.

"Mr. Riley—" Roland began, taking a cautious step forward.

But Collin didn't let him finish. He raised a gun and pointed it directly at the man's forehead. "If you speak again," he said icily, "I'll shoot you."

Roland blanched, stumbling back in silent terror.

Before the tension could thicken further, a slender figure stepped between them. With a mix of fear and fury in her voice, Linsey snapped, "Collin, have you lost your mind? That's your grandmother's butler! How can you point a gun at him like that?"

"Stay out of it," he growled. His voice was like ice, edged with fury.

Even in her fear, Linsey held her ground. "It is my business," she insisted, chin raised defiantly. "Whatever you're going through, it doesn't justify threatening someone's life!"

Chapter 1198:

The tension between them thickened like a storm cloud, ready to burst. Linsey trembled slightly but remained resolute, while Collin radiated fury.

Roland shifted nervously behind her, terrified that Collin might accidentally pull the trigger—or worse, hurt Linsey. But then, something unexpected happened.

Collin lowered the gun.

Roland blinked in disbelief, half-convinced he was hallucinating. Everyone knew: when Collin was angry, there was no reasoning with him. No one dared confront him—except, apparently, Linsey.

A woman who, despite having just married him, could cut through his rage with a few sharp words.

Without saying another word, Collin cast Linsey a final, smoldering glare, then wheeled himself away.

Linsey stood still, heart hammering, her breath shallow. Only when he was gone did her tightly coiled nerves begin to unwind.

Once the crisis passed, Linsey turned to Roland with genuine concern. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, thank you," Roland replied, offering a grateful smile.

Initially, Roland hadn't paid much attention to Linsey before entering the house. However, her brave intervention had caught his interest, and he found himself studying her with newfound respect. "May I have your name?" he asked warmly.

Linsey's smile remained polite. "Linsey."

The butler committed the name to memory, something subtle shifting in his expression.

Over the following minutes, he gently probed into Linsey's background with seemingly casual questions. She answered openly, seeing no reason to hide anything.

When Collin eventually called her upstairs, Roland slipped away to make a discreet phone call.

Someone picked up on the first ring.

Glancing around nervously, Roland cupped his hand over the phone and whispered, "Mrs. Riley, it's me."

That evening brought new arrangements. Roland remained at the house as instructed, officially there to attend to Collin while secretly monitoring the couple's every interaction.

After dinner, Linsey lingered at the dining table, planning to send Felix a message.

Just as she began typing her concerns, Collin's voice cut through her thoughts. "Linsey."

Her head snapped up instinctively, wariness flickering in her eyes. "What do you want?"

Nothing good ever came from him using her name in that particular tone. True to form, Collin's next words carried an unmistakable command. "Are you finished eating? If so, come help me with my bath."

Linsey stared at him in disbelief, wondering if her ears had deceived her or if he had truly lost his mind.

"Are you kidding?" Reality crashed back into her as she snapped those words out, her entire body language screaming rejection. "You're perfectly capable of handling this yourself. Why on earth would you need me to help you bathe?"

"I'm disabled," he stated flatly, his frown deepening.

Chapter 1199:

The words caught her off guard for a moment. Her eyes darted away before she fired back, "Last I checked, you don't need feet to wash yourself. Your hands work just fine."

Rather than address her logic, Collin shifted tactics entirely. "You are my wife. A wife has duties to her husband."

"This marriage was forced on me," Linsey shot back, her voice ringing with defiance.

Collin's expression turned thunderous, his eyes boring into her with icy fury. She met his glare without flinching, her own gaze blazing with stubborn resistance. His perpetual sternness didn't intimidate her anymore.

This time, she refused to back down no matter what threats he made. Helping him bathe crossed every line she had left. The very idea was absolutely ridiculous. She simply wouldn't do it.

In the bathroom, Linsey found herself crouched beside the pristine white bathtub, testing the water temperature with trembling fingers.

Minutes earlier, Collin had once again dangled Felix's company over her head like a sword, forcing her to surrender to his impossible demands.

While she adjusted the water, Collin remained comfortably seated in his wheelchair, his penetrating gaze never leaving her. A satisfied smirk curved his lips as he watched her every movement.

The water temperature finally reached the right setting, and droplets began falling steadily into the tub with soft, rhythmic plops.

"Linsey." His voice cut through the bathroom's stillness, low and commanding. Her shoulders tensed involuntarily. Every fiber of her being wanted to ignore him, but she knew better than to try. Turning reluctantly, she managed a tight, "What now?"

Something dangerous flickered in Collin's eyes as he gestured toward the shallow puddle of water collecting in the tub. "Keep stalling like this, and I'll make you join me in there as punishment."

Water suddenly gushed forth in a torrent, cascading down like a miniature waterfall and sending droplets flying in all directions.

Finally, Collin looked pleased with her urgency.

Once the tub filled to his satisfaction, he beckoned her over with a simple gesture.

Linsey forced herself to stand and walk toward him, each step feeling heavier than the last.

Even though she stood while he remained seated, something about Collin's overwhelming presence made her feel utterly small. When their eyes met, it was as if he loomed over her despite the difference in their physical positions.

“Why are you just standing around? Come here and give me a hand,” Collin called out.

A soft “Oh,” escaped Linsey as she stepped behind his wheelchair, pushing him forward at a careful pace.

When they reached the bathtub, she leaned in to help, but Collin’s hand caught her wrist before she could do anything else. He gave the slightest pull, closing the distance until their breaths mingled. Those deep eyes of his drew her in, and for a second, Linsey’s heart hammered against her ribs.

Amusement flashed in Collin’s gaze. “Is that it? You’re looking for an excuse to get in here with me, aren’t you?”

Warm breath teased her cheek, sending her nerves into overdrive.

Fighting the heat rising in her face, Linsey yanked her arm away. “That’s absurd! Who would want to do that with you?”

Chapter 1200:

“Stop wasting time,” Collin retorted, gesturing to his shirt. “Take this off for me.”

Linsey hesitated, her feet rooted to the spot. His patience thinning, Collin reached out, fingers aimed at her buttons. “If you won’t move, I’ll just start on your clothes instead.”

Alarm jolted Linsey into action. She threw her arms over her chest. “Hold on! I’ll help. Just give me a second!”

With an impatient huff, Collin dropped his hand. “Then get to it. Now.”

Determined, Linsey bit her lip and stepped closer, her hands shaking as she tackled the buttons on his shirt. One by one, the fabric parted, finally revealing the sculpted lines of his abs.

Before she could even process it, Collin bent in and sent a playful breath along her ear, his voice low and teasing. "You're not finished yet. These pants have to go."

Frozen, Linsey stared at him in disbelief. Collin grinned, unable to help himself.

"Unless you like to bathe fully dressed?"

His words seemed to float past her. She couldn't answer.

Desperately, she tried to convince herself that she was just washing a dog, nothing more.

With that bit of resolve, she reached for his belt.

Completely out of her element, Linsey fumbled with the buckle and, in a small voice, asked, "How does this thing even come undone?"

Drawn so near, Collin picked up the faintest trace of flowers lingering on her skin, and it made his breath catch unexpectedly.

Instead of offering clear instructions, he decided to push her buttons. "Why not figure it out on your own? I thought you were clever."

Irritation flickered across Linsey's face. She instantly wished she had never spoken up.

Not a word escaped her lips as she studied the belt, trying to puzzle it out. A delicate ring of metal sat in the center of the buckle, giving it a surprisingly complicated look.

Suspecting the trick lay there, she narrowed her gaze, determined to solve the mystery.

In the process, her fingertips grazed his trousers more than once, sending subtle jolts through the air between them.

What started as assistance left Collin reeling, a wave of heat coursing through him. The slightest touches had him burning, the reaction impossible to hide.

Meanwhile, Linsey's eyes landed on a hidden button tucked into the buckle. Pressing it gently, she heard a click as the buckle released.

"Phew. That wasn't so hard," she murmured, feeling a rush of pride at her success.

But in that fleeting moment, her hand brushed up against something unmistakably firm and hot.

Wide-eyed, she froze, stunned by what she had just discovered. When had things gotten so intense?

As if stung, Linsey snatched her hand away, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

The look on her face made Collin laugh, a wicked glint lighting up his eyes. "What's got you so startled? Did you expect me to be less impressive than that?"