

Zillionaire 1241

Chapter 1241:

Before she could process what was happening, a strong hand pulled her into a firm embrace, and a strikingly handsome face appeared mere inches from hers. Startled, Linsey immediately pushed against the man's chest, stumbling backward several steps until her back pressed against the door. She stared at him in complete shock.

Several seconds of stunned silence passed before she glared at him accusingly. "Why are you lurking around like some kind of shadow?"

Collin remained motionless, his penetrating gaze fixed intently on hers.

That intense stare made Linsey's scalp prickle with unease. Steeling herself, she demanded, "What do you want?"

Linsey couldn't help but think his moods shifted like storm clouds—completely unpredictable. Fortunately, she had developed nerves of steel. Otherwise, she feared he might genuinely frighten her to death one of these days.

While she was lost in these thoughts, Collin didn't answer her question but instead asked, "What did Grandma say to you? Did she ask you to leave me?" Anxiety crept into his voice as he pulled her closer once more, his fingers gripping her chin firmly. The air between them crackled with tension.

His tone turned commanding, almost desperate. "Linsey, listen to me carefully. You belong to me, even in death. If you dare listen to Grandma and leave me, I'll end you right here and now!"

Those words made Linsey's eyes roll involuntarily.

She met his intense gaze steadily and lifted his hand away from her face. "Stop acting like a madman."

“Who’s acting like a madman?” Collin fixed her with what he hoped was a fierce glare. “I’m completely serious.”

“Whoever responds is the one being crazy,” Linsey said calmly.

“You...”

Collin’s fury blazed as he reached out to grab her neck, but Linsey showed no trace of fear, swatting his hand away with swift precision.

The next moment, she adopted a stern, almost maternal tone. “If you keep this up, I really will leave.”

“Don’t you dare!” The mere mention of leaving triggered Collin’s explosive roar, his voice thundering so loudly it seemed capable of bursting Linsey’s eardrums. “No, what I meant was... Um...”

Before Linsey could finish her sentence, Collin’s large hand cupped the back of her head, and he bent down to capture her lips in a fierce, demanding kiss. Linsey pushed him away with every ounce of strength, then instinctively raised her hand to deliver a sharp slap across his face.

She couldn’t help but think he was absolutely insane, always launching into these possessive kisses without warning, like some overbearing male lead straight out of a melodrama.

Just as her palm was about to connect with Collin’s face, Ivy’s gentle voice suddenly rang in her memory.

Linsey’s lips pressed into a thin line as she slowly lowered her raised hand, her expression turning serious. “I’ll be merciful and overlook this behavior.”

Collin stared at her, and neither broke the silence.

After what felt like an eternity, reality finally crashed over him as her earlier words registered in his mind.

“Hold on... are you telling me Grandma didn’t try convincing you to leave me?” he questioned, his voice suddenly uncertain.

Chapter 1242:

The truth was, Ivy had done exactly that, but Linsey had turned her down flat.

Yet, if she had known he was this much trouble, she wouldn’t have refused so quickly. After all, how wonderful it would be to live luxuriously with a five-million-dollar check in her pocket.

Linsey had originally planned to tell him exactly that, but wisdom prevailed as she realized he would undoubtedly throw another tantrum upon hearing it. To spare her eardrums from another assault, she simply nodded along with his assumption.

Collin regarded her with genuine bewilderment before pressing further. “Why?” Previously, Ivy had called him specifically to voice her strong disapproval of their...

Marriage. What could have caused such a sudden change of heart? The puzzle gnawed at him.

“How should I know?” Linsey replied with obvious impatience. “Dinner’s waiting downstairs. Let’s eat.”

Collin, still distracted by his confusion, responded automatically, “I’m not eating. I’ve been so furious waiting for you that I’ve lost my appetite.” He had expected this declaration to draw an apology from Linsey.

To his shock, she turned away without the slightest hesitation, showing no intention of coddling him. “Eat if you want, or don’t. Your choice entirely.” Skipping one meal wouldn’t kill him, after all. By the time Collin processed what was happening, Linsey had already reached the staircase, prepared to head down alone.

“Linsey.” His knuckles turned white as he gripped the railing, rage coursing through his veins. “Get back here!”

“Not listening!” Linsey clapped her hands over her ears and bolted away, vanishing from his sight in seconds.

Collin stood there seething, his expression turning thunderously dark. True to his stubborn declaration, Collin refused to eat, and Linsey couldn’t care less about his self-imposed hunger strike.

She returned to the bedroom after enjoying a leisurely dinner, while Collin had planted himself on the sofa, aggressively flipping through a book.

The sound of the door opening made him look up reflexively.

But the moment he saw it was her, Collin’s head snapped back down, his expression souring as he turned the pages with such violent force it seemed he might rip the book to shreds.

Linsey caught the aggressive rustling sound and glanced over, only to notice the book clutched in his hands bore the title “The Art of Strategy for Men in a Relationship—Patience Above All.”

Confusion clouded Linsey’s features as her brows furrowed, but she remained silent, turning toward the bathroom for a much-needed shower.

Collin’s irritation flared at her indifferent response. The moment she disappeared behind the bathroom door, he seized the book and hurled it straight into the trash can.

Steam still clung to Linsey’s skin as she emerged from the bathroom, immediately beginning her search for a hairdryer.

“Hey—” Collin’s voice cut through the silence from his position on the sofa, his patience finally snapping. “It’s been two hours. How much longer are you planning to keep up this sulking act?”

Linsey barely suppressed the urge to roll her eyes. She couldn’t believe he had the audacity to accuse her of making a scene when he was the one throwing tantrums.

Chapter 1243:

Having no interest in his theatrics, Linsey continued her hunt for the hairdryer.

Collin wheeled himself closer, inexplicably agitated by her persistent silence. His frustration mounted as he called out once more, "Hey, are you seriously ignoring me?"

Those repeated "heys" finally pushed Linsey past her breaking point.

Her knuckles whitened around the hairdryer she had just located as she spun around, her voice sharp with anger. "My name isn't 'hey'! If you're going to have a breakdown, please do it somewhere else. Stop harassing me. Do you honestly think I'm some pushover with no temper?"

Their gazes locked in the charged air between them, the atmosphere crackling with tension.

Linsey braced herself for his inevitable explosion, already mentally preparing her next move.

Yet Collin's reaction caught her completely off guard.

Rather than erupting in anger, he laughed softly, his eyes studying her face with newfound fascination. "Well then, let's see this temper of yours."

Linsey's words died in her throat.

After two hours of being stonewalled, Collin was finally getting the reaction he craved, and it lifted his spirits considerably. His lips curved into a challenging smile.

"What's wrong? Didn't you just claim to have a temper? Go ahead, then. Show me what you've got."

Linsey remained silent, rage coursing through her veins until the hairdryer shook violently in her grip.

Only a thin thread of self-control prevented her from launching the appliance straight at his smug face, which would have given him a perfect demonstration of her so-called temper.

Collin's keen eyes caught every tremor that wracked her frame.

Reality hit him like a cold slap as he recognized that his teasing had crossed a line, and the amused gleam in his eyes dimmed. His finger traced his nose in an awkward gesture of discomfort.

"I'm hungry," he announced, desperately grasping for a way to redirect the conversation.

Linsey's response was to pointedly ignore him, her movements sharp as she located the electrical outlet for her hairdryer.

Just as her finger found the power button, Collin's hand shot out to yank the plug from the wall.

Before Linsey could voice her outrage, his own frustration exploded. "I told you I'm hungry. Are you deaf?"

What exactly did he expect her to do about his hunger? Starve for all she cared! The thought blazed through her mind while she forced out a weary sigh. "Fine. What do you want?"

Collin's voice carried the weight of absolute authority. "Go make me something to eat."

Linsey drew in a slow, steadying breath before delivering her flat refusal. "No. I'm drying my hair."

His tone turned mockingly sweet as he parroted her words back with infuriating dominance. "You're going to cook for me first, then worry about your hair."

Chapter 1244:

Once again, Linsey found herself trapped in speechless fury, her entire body quaking with the force of her suppressed rage.

After several more rounds of this exhausting battle, she finally surrendered, unwilling to waste another ounce of energy on his childish demands. With heavy resignation, she accepted her fate of preparing his meal.

Collin watched her storm off, unable to suppress the victorious grin spreading across his face.

In his mind, Linsey was clearly the type of woman who protested loudly but secretly enjoyed being told what to do. After all, she had claimed she wouldn't cook for him, yet here she was, practically racing to the kitchen to do exactly that.

Dawn broke over another day, and Linsey dragged herself down the stairs with a jaw-cracking yawn, dark circles shadowing her eyes like bruises.

The memory of last night's ordeal with Collin haunted her thoughts like a recurring nightmare.

His behavior had reached new levels of insanity. No sooner had she finished making some spaghetti than he was already barking orders for her to march back downstairs and get him a glass of water.

What made it even more exasperating was how Collin transformed into a complete nightmare after filling his stomach. Sleep eluded him, and he refused to grant Linsey any peace either. Deep into the night, he demanded she spin tales to lull him into slumber.

Fairy tales earned his instant scorn, jokes were swiftly dismissed, and his twisted preference demanded horror stories exclusively.

Poor Linsey found herself frantically searching online for suitable tales to read aloud.

The cruel irony struck hard when he drifted off with blissful contentment while she remained bolt upright, trembling with terror until the first light of dawn.

Morning found Linsey dragging herself to the dining table where Collin already sat waiting.

Their gazes locked, and the grudge from last night's torment still burned fresh in her mind. She offered no greeting, simply yanked out her chair and collapsed into it.

Collin appeared completely unbothered and casually opened the conversation. "You're coming with me somewhere later."

Those words made Linsey freeze mid-yawn, her hand still pressed against her mouth.

Reading her face like an open book, Collin immediately pressed further. "What, you don't want to go?"

"Exactly right." Linsey's honesty cut through the morning air without hesitation.

Collin showed no irritation at her blunt rejection. His knife and fork moved with deliberate precision as he continued cutting his food, speaking with calm authority. "Aren't you even curious about where we're going?"

"Not in the slightest." Linsey's response came flat and emotionless before she drained nearly half her milk in one long gulp.

Last night's sleepless ordeal had left her completely drained, and Roland's early morning knock about breakfast had only made things worse. Drowsiness weighed down every fiber of her being, and all she craved was to finish this meal and crawl back under her covers. Venturing anywhere was her absolute last priority.

She assumed the topic would die there, that Collin wouldn't push any further. But he proved as unpredictable as ever.

Chapter 1245:

“Whether you want to go or not is irrelevant. You have to,” he declared with quiet finality.

Linsey’s expression darkened, and the glass of milk slipped from her startled grip, striking the table with a dull thud.

He had tormented her all night, and now he was pulling the same nonsense this morning. What had she possibly done to deserve this endless torture?

Linsey’s blood began to boil as fury consumed her thoughts. The idea of calling Ivy suddenly seemed brilliant. Maybe she could still grab that five-million-dollar check and escape this nightmare.

She genuinely couldn’t stand being around Collin for another moment. The man was absolutely insufferable.

Just then, Collin’s voice drifted to her ears with unexpected calm. “We need to visit Grandma, but there’s no rush. You didn’t sleep well last night, so finish breakfast and get some rest first. We’ll go when you wake up.”

Linsey’s expression shifted to pure bewilderment. “What? Why do we need to pay her a visit?”

Collin heard her question, and her eyebrow arched slightly while a faint smile tugged at his lips. For once, his tone carried genuine gentleness and patience. “Since you’ve married me, you should visit my grandmother, shouldn’t you?”

Those words hit her like a revelation. Linsey fell completely silent.

Something suddenly crossed Collin’s mind, and his expression turned ice-cold as he continued. “Besides Grandma, there are several others there. I’ll introduce you to them before we leave. If they give you any trouble, don’t let it bother you. I’ll handle them.”

His words made Linsey blink in confusion, her drowsiness lifting slightly. Could Collin be referring to Alfredo and his new family? Curiosity sparked in Linsey’s mind.

But she decided against prying further and simply nodded her agreement. "Got it."

Dusk was already painting the sky when Linsey and Collin finally pulled up to the Riley family's mansion.

The main culprit behind their tardiness was, naturally, her extended sleep. It wasn't until Ivy's call jolted her awake that Linsey discovered Collin had actually scheduled their arrival for noon.

Realizing this, Linsey turned to complain to Collin beside her. "Why didn't you tell me earlier that you'd set a specific time with Ivy? I thought we could actually arrive whenever we wanted."

Collin's expression remained perfectly composed as he replied with casual indifference, "It's better to arrive well-rested than to show up looking like the walking dead. Otherwise, they might think you've come to haunt them instead of pay a visit."

A dramatic sigh escaped Linsey as she rolled her eyes in disbelief. More than once, she had fantasized about slipping Collin a poison just to make him hush.

When they neared the towering gates of the Riley family mansion, Collin raised his hand, signaling for the bodyguard to stop the wheelchair. Seeing him pause, Linsey stopped too. She glanced at him, confusion crossing her face, and asked, "Is there a problem?"

Without hesitation, Collin answered, "Trade places with the bodyguard and push me instead. I don't want anyone thinking we're not close."

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"Alright," she responded, giving in without complaint. IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE CHAPTERS, PLEASE VISIT fundnovel.net

They reached the entrance together. At Collin's nod, Linsey pressed the doorbell, sending a quiet chime echoing through the halls. A sharp sound rang out, reverberating through the entryway.

Instead of the usual butler or a uniformed maid, a man with striking features appeared. Casually dressed in a silver-gray shirt, an untied tie, and cuffs left open, he radiated a careless confidence. The strong scent of liquor clung to him.

Collin's half-brother, Huntley, stood before them.

No trace of courtesy appeared on Huntley's face when he noticed Collin. He flashed him a sly grin and said, "Collin, you've got guts, making Grandma and Dad wait for you. Do you have no respect?"

Collin's eyes twinkled as he replied, "That's bold coming from you, Huntley. Weren't you the one who nearly killed someone during your midnight bender and left the whole family waiting at the police station for two days? My nerve pales in comparison."

"You..." Huntley faltered, anger rising in his eyes, his cheeks burning as if Collin had struck a nerve.

A heavy silence settled over the entryway, tension rippling between the brothers. Shock rendered Linsey motionless, her place held just to the side.

Before Linsey could break the silence with a few calming words, a crisp feminine voice sliced through the awkwardness. "Collin, welcome home." The sound of closer footsteps announced the arrival of Collin's stepmother, Fernanda, who shimmered with expensive jewelry and greeted him with forced warmth. "We've all been waiting for you. Please, hurry inside."

Ignoring her completely, Collin kept his focus elsewhere, not sparing her a glance.

The reaction caused Fernanda to pause, her smile faltering before she quickly replaced it with her usual pleasant expression. She opened her mouth, ready to continue, but caught sight of Linsey instead, smoothly shifting her attention. "And who might you be?"

Their eyes met for the first time as Linsey, dressed in a sophisticated gown and offering a distant, courteous smile, introduced herself. "It's a pleasure. I'm Linsey, Collin's wife."

Fernanda took a moment to study Linsey from head to toe, an unmistakable chill settling in her gaze. All her careful plans to humiliate Collin by chasing away his bride on their wedding day had come to nothing. Linsey had defied expectations and shown up anyway.

Fernanda had never heard of Linsey before, and her mind quickly painted Linsey as nothing more than a small-town girl with no pedigree. Resentment simmered behind her polished mask, though she kept her voice smooth and inviting. "How wonderful to meet you, Linsey. Don't stand out here. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you," Linsey replied, stepping forward to guide Collin inside. From the corner, Huntley's eyes lingered on Linsey, open admiration lighting up his expression.

A sharp note in Fernanda's voice drew his attention. "Huntley, is there something on your mind?"

His gaze stayed fixed on Linsey, and with a rough swallow, he replied, "Collin's wife is absolutely gorgeous..."

His words had barely left his mouth when Fernanda's hand landed on his arm with a light smack.

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Huntley finally looked her way, annoyance flashing in his eyes. "What was that for?"

Fernanda shot Huntley a sharp, disapproving glance. "I'm warning you, Linsey is Collin's girl. Don't even think about getting involved."

Her words only fueled Huntley's defiance. With a dismissive scoff, he boldly declared, "Collin's girl? That just makes me want to steal her even more."

Fernanda's hand flew to cover his mouth, her eyes darting around in panic. She feared someone might overhear his reckless statement. Once certain they were alone, she pulled her hand back, her face creased with a frown. "Wasn't your drunken escapade last night enough? Go splash some water on your face and snap out of it. If your father hears you talking like this, you'll regret it."

Huntley didn't fear Fernanda, but Alfredo was another story. Grudgingly, he gave in and complied.

That evening, the family gathered for dinner. Huntley's gaze locked onto Linsey without a hint of subtlety. Out of nowhere, he said in a teasing tone, "Linsey, don't we know each other from somewhere?"

Linsey froze mid-bite, startled by his remark. The others at the table turned their attention to the pair.

"You two have met before?" Collin asked, his brows knitting together as he sat beside Linsey. His investigations had never turned up any link between her and Huntley.

Linsey, visibly confused, couldn't respond right away. She studied Huntley across the table, racking her brain for any memory of him, but came up empty. Her only recollection of Huntley was from when Ivy visited Vista Villa and mentioned him as Collin's half-brother while discussing Collin's past.

Snapping out of her thoughts, Linsey shook her head with a polite, apologetic smile. "I'm sorry, I don't recall ever meeting you."

Huntley raised an eyebrow, his eyes glinting with mischief. "Sounds like your memory's playing tricks on you."

As he spoke, a piece of fish landed on his plate.

He glanced over to see Fernanda adding a pork rib to his plate, her voice a hushed whisper meant only for him. "Enough talking. Eat."

Fernanda had no intention of letting her polished son get tangled up with someone like Linsey.

Brushing off her warning, Huntley pressed on, undeterred. "I distinctly remember meeting you at a Ruiz Group banquet. We didn't chat long, but it was a memorable conversation."

His words sparked a faint memory in Linsey.

She generally avoided banquets, and that particular day, she had been battling a high fever. But since Ruiz Group was a key partner of Felix's company, he had insisted she attend, leaving her no choice but to dress up and go.

The banquet, masked as a social gathering, was really a networking hub for corporate bigwigs. Felix, a lightweight when it came to alcohol, had her handle the toasts. Most executives were content with one drink, but Huntley had pushed her to down three shots of whiskey.

By the end of the night, she had been hunched over in the bathroom, sick and miserable, only to be berated by Felix for making a mess.

Linsey had kept things civil with Huntley up to now, but the memory stirred a quiet resentment, and her tone carried a slight edge. "Yes, I remember that now."

She expected him to drop it, but to her surprise, Huntley kept going, refusing to let the conversation die.

Chapter 1248:

"Linsey, I remember you had a fiancé not long ago. You two were practically glued together. So how did you become Collin's wife in less than a month?" Huntley spoke casually, but his eyes kept drifting toward Collin. "If I'm not mistaken, Collin got married the same day you were supposed to marry your fiancé, isn't that right?"

Only Ivy knew the full truth—that Collin had forced Linsey into the marriage. She had even helped hide it from the rest of the Riley family. But Huntley didn't believe her. He felt there was more to the story.

Knowing Collin's reckless nature, Huntley wouldn't put it past him to crash Linsey's wedding and take her by force. Now, he was trying to draw the truth out of Linsey, hoping to make Collin look bad and stir Alfredo's anger enough to make him act.

Nothing pleased Huntley more than seeing Collin humiliated and punished. To him, Collin was a stain on the family name. But what happened next caught him off guard.

Linsey calmly rose to Collin's defense. "I married Collin by choice."

Collin had been eating quietly, pretending to ignore everything. But when he heard Linsey's soft reply, he looked up. His eyes flickered with surprise, and his brows lifted slightly.

Linsey was clever. She saw through Huntley's attempt to corner them. Without rushing, she met his stare and began to speak with ease.

"Collin and I have known each other for a long time. I even confessed to him once, but he turned me down. That's how I ended up with my ex. On my wedding day, I caught my fiancé cheating. So I walked away. Coincidentally, I ran into Collin. He told me his fiancée had also left. After talking for a while, I suggested we get married."

Then, with a composed smile that masked her true emotions, she added, "Our marriage was a mutual decision. It also saved the family from embarrassment on what was supposed to be Collin's big day. Any more questions?"

Huntley had thought Linsey would be easy to rattle—sweet, innocent, and naïve. But her sharp tongue and steady poise left him speechless.

For a moment, he couldn't think of what to say.

The mood at the table shifted.

Then Ivy stepped in to ease the tension. "That's enough. Let's not dwell on the past. Linsey and Collin are meant to be, and I like her very much. There's nothing wrong with this marriage."

With Ivy speaking so firmly, Huntley had no choice but to let it go and quietly continue eating.

After the meal, Alfredo, who had been silent the whole time, finally spoke. His voice was cold and commanding. "Come to the study later. We need to talk." He didn't say a name, but Collin knew the words were meant for him.

If it were Huntley, Alfredo would have addressed him directly. That was how deep Alfredo's dislike for him ran. Just saying Collin's name seemed to disgust him.

Collin was used to it. He gave a slight nod, his face unreadable. For more chapters visit [FindN\(\)vel.net](http://FindN()vel.net)

Once dinner came to an end, the Riley family at the table quietly scattered, each slipping away to manage their own affairs. Alfredo and Collin headed upstairs for a private conversation, Fernanda scooped up the cat and disappeared into her room for some pampering, and Huntley found a quiet spot elsewhere to take a call. Meanwhile, the staff moved quickly, clearing away plates and tidying up the dining room.

One by one, everyone had something to keep them busy, leaving Linsey as the only one with no clear task.

Chapter 1249:

Life at the Riley family residence felt different from the laid-back atmosphere at Vista Villa. Surrounded by the Riley family, Linsey made sure to sit up straight, choosing a seat instead of stretching out on the couch. She watched the room with quiet curiosity.

Noticing Linsey sitting alone, Ivy took it upon herself to settle down beside her and offer some friendly company.

They chatted for a while, the conversation flowing easily. Soon, Ivy brightened with an idea and opened a nearby drawer. "You probably haven't gone through our photo albums yet. Let me show you who's who in the family." First, she pointed out a photo of her late husband, Anson Riley.

Hearing that Anson had built Riley Group from the ground up, Linsey felt a genuine sense of admiration for the man's achievements.

With a gentle smile, Ivy placed Anson's picture next to one of Collin. "Take a look, Linsey. Don't you think they share the same eyes? Out of everyone, Anson was always the one who spoiled Collin the most."

As the evening wore on, their conversation made the hours slip by unnoticed. Ivy's eyelids began to droop.

Linsey noticed the fatigue and gently suggested, "You should get some rest, Ivy. Why not head to your room?"

Once Ivy had retired for the night, Linsey realized Collin still hadn't come back downstairs. With nothing else to do, she rose and wandered out into the garden.

A voice, easy and slightly teasing, drifted from somewhere behind her. "Why don't you leave Collin for me?"

The remark made Linsey turn around at once.

Garden lights cast a soft glow along the path, and through the dimness, Linsey could just make out Huntley standing a short distance away. They locked eyes, an unspoken question hanging in the air.

Confusion mixed with a hint of amusement played across Linsey's face. "I have no idea what you're getting at, Huntley."

Only the two of them remained in the garden, the night growing quieter around their unexpected encounter.

Without hesitation, Huntley said, "Let's be real. I don't buy that you chose to marry Collin, considering his condition. Feels more like someone forced your hand."

Sliding his phone into his pocket, he wasted no time closing the gap between them. In no time at all, Huntley stood so close that Linsey could catch the subtle scent of alcohol lingering on his breath.

She opened her mouth to respond, but before a word left her lips, Huntley gently brushed a strand of hair away from her face. His voice softened, the words edged with mischief. "You only need to say the word, and I'll set you up. I can get you a place of your own, a car, diamonds, anything you want. I could make you happier than you've ever been. Tempted yet?" This text is hosted at find-novel-net

No matter how appealing he made it sound, Linsey stayed cool and unaffected. She remembered seeing Huntley work his charms on another woman at the Ruiz Group's banquet, even using nearly identical lines.

Huntley had a reputation for this sort of thing, and she had no intention of becoming another name on his list. Plus, if she ever betrayed Collin, he would definitely make her pay. That thought alone sent a chill down her spine.

Starting out as a Riley, especially meeting Collin's family for the very first time, Linsey knew better than to stir up conflict or draw unnecessary trouble, especially with someone like Huntley.

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Still, Huntley leaned in, pushing for a reaction. "Well? What's your answer?"

Stifling her annoyance, Linsey kept her composure, replying with a measured smile, "I've already said this at dinner, Huntley. Marrying Collin was my decision. Nobody forced me."

As he watched her, Huntley's smirk faded, replaced by a hard, frosty look.

"Women always play hard to get, but aren't you taking it a bit far?"

As she heard Huntley's words, Linsey's smile faded.

"I'm being sincere here. I've never tried to play games with you," she said, her voice steady. "I'll pretend none of this has happened, and I'd appreciate it if you kept your wild stories to yourself the next time you drink. I've got things to do, so I'm leaving."

She turned around and started to walk away.

Before she could get far, Huntley's hand shot out and caught her wrist.

“Let go.” Linsey tried to break free, frustration etching lines into her brow. Huntley, however, was far stronger. Her efforts only made his grip clamp down harder, biting into her skin.

She glanced up and met Huntley’s fierce stare, her pulse skipping. An uneasy feeling crept up her spine.

“Let go of me!” Linsey did her best to sound composed, though her jaw tightened. “Don’t forget. I’m Collin’s wife. Show some respect.”

“Respect?” Huntley mockingly laughed. He looked at her as if she had just told a joke. “Who do you think you are, talking to me like that? A nobody without a family name to back her up?”

A sharp voice suddenly sliced through the charged silence. “She has every right because she’s my wife.”

Neither Linsey nor Huntley expected Collin’s presence in the garden.

Relief washed over Linsey in an instant. Seeing Collin was like grabbing hold of a lifeline after nearly drowning.

Seizing Huntley’s moment of shock, she pulled her wrist free and hurried to Collin’s side without looking back.

Unsure how much Collin had seen, Linsey wasted no time. She pointed accusingly at Huntley. “He crossed the line, Collin! He wouldn’t leave me alone. He was acting indecently!”

“I saw it.” Collin nodded, reaching for her hand and enveloping it in his. His gentle touch did more to calm her than words ever could.

Meanwhile, realization dawned on Huntley.

He shrank under Collin's frigid stare, suddenly feeling awkward and exposed. But he kept silent, deliberately avoiding Collin's eyes as he turned and made for the exit.

Collin, however, wasn't going to let things end there.

"Stay."

One word from Collin, sharp and commanding, brought Huntley to a halt. Huntley instinctively stopped in his tracks, his posture rigid. A moment later, he straightened up, turned around to face Collin, and forced a look of nonchalance, as though the confrontation meant nothing to him.

He met Collin's eyes, then asked, "What do you want?"