

Zillionaire 761

Chapter 761 You've Gone Completely Off The Deep...

Linsey shook her head, her disbelief as thick as fog, eyes locking onto Gorman. "Gorman, you've gone completely off the deep end! You're driving me up the wall!"

Her voice was steel, unyielding. "I'd rather eat dirt than agree to such a ridiculous demand. You could twist my arm with every dirty trick in the book, but I'll never, ever love you."

"That's just peachy with me!" Gorman shot back, his laugh bursting out like a rogue firecracker-bold, wild, reckless. "Love me, hate me, it's all the same to me. As long as you're mine, that's my version of hitting the

jackpot."

Linsey felt her sanity teetering on a knife's edge, her eyes burning, rimmed red with the effort to hold back tears, as Gorman's warped logic pushed her to the breaking point.

"Linsey, no need to jump the gun," Gorman said, his voice smooth as silk, almost too relaxed. His eyes, slightly tilted upward, sparkled with a calculated curiosity. "I'm in no rush for your answer. I've got all the time in the world to wait-patiently, of course. I'm dying to see how this plays out. Who knows? Maybe you'll have a change of heart."

Linsey moved like lightning, lunging forward to grab Gorman's collar in a white-knuckled grip. Her voice cut through the air, low and fierce. "Gorman, what's your next move?"

She took a deep breath, her stance unyielding, every inch of her radiating a mama bear's resolve. "Hear me loud and clear: if you dare lay a finger on my children, I'll fight you tooth and nail to the bitter end!"

To her shock, Gorman didn't get mad. Instead, a soft smile curved his lips, unruffled. He lifted a hand-not to shove her off, but to gently wrap around her clenched fist. "Easy, Linsey. I'm not an idiot. I know those kids are your whole world right now. Why would I do something so boneheaded as to hurt you like that?"

Locking eyes with her, he continued, "Nah, I'm playing the long game-charming them, winning them over. I'd appreciate it if you'd play along. But if Zenia and Zander suddenly turn on me, well, I can't promise I'll keep my cool forever."

With that, Gorman reached out, his fingers brushing a loose strand of hair from Linsey's face with a tenderness that felt like a trap. His voice dropped to a murmur. "Take care of yourself, Linsey. Get some rest. I'll swing by again soon."

Linsey's face was a mask of stone as she slapped his hand away, the motion dripping with barely contained fury.

Gorman just let out a low chuckle, hollow and mirthless, before turning on his heel with the grace of a cat. The second the door creaked open, Zander's bright voice floated in from the hall. "Gorman!"

Linsey's eyes widened, her heart burching on prae metus, the that format, scooping, tanker t still clutching Cayler's hand to her me, cunting forms of before he could per word in

Caught off guard by the sudden kng, Zander samlet sightly or quiddy wrapped fie arme underwa peering up with a worried from "Mommy, you say?"

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Linsey froze, her eyes locked on Gorman, who returned her ears with a fingers, pressed protectionly against Zandere herkes just

"I'm fine, baby," she replied, her one rough but steady

Anyone who caught the ghostly pallor of tinney's face in that moment could see the was anything but okay

Caylee stood rooted to the spot for a heartbeat, her eyes darting terwoudly between Linsey and Gorman, worry etched across her face.

For reasons she couldn't quite pin down, the air between them felt charged, like a storm about to break, frack with unspoken tension

Linsey, especially, was a live wire-her every dance and obte shift screaming

distrust toward Gorman, ber wariness practically a physical force.

What the hell had just gone down?

Before Caylee could even start to untangle the strange vibe, Gorman turned to her, his voice dropping into an unexpectedly grave tone. "Look after Linsey, alright? If anything feels off, you let me know right away."

Chapter 762 I Had No

Choice

Gorman's words slammed into Caylee like a freight train, her eyes popping wide in utter shock.

She shot a quick glance at Gorman, who gave off a cool, careless vibe, before her gaze darted back to Linsey's, brimming with a hollow despair that stole the air from Caylee's lungs.

A cold shiver snaked its way down her back.

Gorman, cool as a cucumber, didn't miss a beat and breezed out of the room, his steps practically bouncing.

The hotel room fell quiet, holding just Linsey, Caylee, and the tiny Zander nestled in Linsey's arms.

After a moment, Linsey's fingers softly danced through Zander's downy hair. She leaned in close, her voice a gentle whisper. "Be a good boy, Zander. Your sister's in there, out like a light. Why don't you slip in and snuggle up with her? I need a quick word with Caylee."

Zander gave a small nod and tiptoed into the room, easing the door shut with a soft click.

That faint sound snuffed out the last flicker of hope Caylee had been clinging to.

The last, frail glimmer of hope in Caylee was extinguished as the door clicked gently shut.

Without a word, Linsey moved with a grim, no-turning-back resolve to the sofa and sank into it.

The brutal showdown with Gorman had clearly wrung her dry, sapping her strength.

But she knew this mess was far from settled.

Caylee sucked in a shaky breath, her hands locked so tight her knuckles gleamed white. She took a hesitant step toward Linsey.

"Why?" Linsey's voice sliced through the thick silence, sharp and out of nowhere.

That single word hit like a thunderbolt. Caylee got it in a heartbeat-Linsey had seen right through the whole

charade.

Linsey was no fool; Gorman hadn't needed to spell it out for her to connect the dots.

The offhand way Gorman had bossed Caylee around, like she was just a piece on his chessboard, sealed it. This wasn't a one-off; it was a pattern.

And it explained why, ever since she rolled back into Grester, Gorman always seemed one step ahead, like he had a tracker on her life. He was always in the know first.

Caylee had been his eyes and ears, the mole right in her orbit, feeding Gorman every scrap of intel

Caylee's voice broke, heavy with tears she hadn't let fall. "Linsey, I'm so sorry. I swear, I was backed into a corner... My grandma's real sick, needs surgery bad, and I didn't have a dime. Mr. Green was the only one who'd help. I'm telling you, I had no choice...

After pausing for a moment, she continued, "My grandma's all I've got, Linsey. We're all each other has. I couldn't let her go... my only family... Please, you gotta believe me. I didn't do anything shady for Mr. Green...

I swear I didn't..."

Linsey let out a long, slow breath, her voice dropping to a frosty edge. "And what exactly counts as 'shady' to

you, Caylee?"

The casual, almost mocking question landed like a sucker punch. Caylee stared at Linsey's blank, stone-cold face, her eyes burning, a sick dread twisting tight in her gut.

A slow, eerie grin crept across Linsey's face. "Gorman sure knows how to deal a winning hand."

He had revealed Caylee's betrayal with surgical precision, striking when Linsey was vulnerable.

He was sending a crystal-clear message: he could plant moles right in her inner circle without her blinking. Even if Linsey booted Caylee out now, Gorman would just slip another pawn into place, keeping his grip tight. And if Caylee ever became dead weight, Gorman wouldn't hesitate to pull the plug on her grandmother's

lifeline.

"Linsey, I'm so sorry..." Caylee's voice faltered, words drying up under the weight of her guilt.

She felt naked, her shame laid bare for exploiting Linsey's generosity.

Linsey shut her eyes for a heartbeat, steadying herself, before her voice came, soft but loaded. "Caylee, level with me. How much does your grandmother's care really cost?"

Caylee kept her head down, her voice a faint murmur as she spilled the number. It was a jaw-dropping amount.

"She's not out of the woods yet," Caylee added, her voice rough and raw. "The doc says more bills are coming."

Chapter 763 Do Exactly What I'm Telling You

Linsey's heart sank as she took in Caylee's words.

Right then, it hit her like a ton of bricks: Caylee had made the only call she could.

Deep down, Linsey knew she would never have scraped together the cash for that surgery, not with her own

two hands.

Still, she was gutted, her faith in Caylee shattered by what she had done.

Still, after all the time they had spent together, Linsey couldn't just stand there and let Caylee's grandma kick the bucket over a stack of unpaid bills.

A wry, self-mocking grin tugged at her lips.

If she had been in Caylee's shoes, she would have jumped at Gorman's deal too- anything to keep the last piece of her world from slipping away.

"I get it," Linsey finally said, eyes fixed on the floor, her voice flat as a pancake. "You can keep working for Gorman."

Caylee's head snapped up, eyes wide as saucers, brows knitted in shock. "Linsey, no way! I'm done with that, I swear. I'm not passing another word to Mr. Green, cross my heart."

"What about your grandma?" Linsey asked, her voice cutting through the heavy air.

Caylee's face froze, her eyes swimming with confusion, like she had been thrown into deep water without a

lifeline.

Linsey held her gaze, silent for a beat, until a strange calm settled over her like a quiet tide.

She reached out, gently grabbing Caylee's hands and pulling her down to sit next to her on the bed's edge.

"Listen up," Linsey said, her voice steady as a rock, gripping Caylee's hands like they were her anchor, "your grandma's medical bills can't stop. Not now, not ever. You've got to keep feeding Gorman his reports, same as always. And don't breathe a word to me about what he's got you doing."

Caylee's jaw dropped, her head shaking like she was trying to shake off a bad dream. "Linsey, no, I can't... I won't."

Linsey cut her off, her tone sharp and unyielding, like a captain barking orders in a storm. "Trust me, Caylee. Do exactly what I'm telling you."

She knew, with a cold certainty that chilled her to the bone, that Gorman was bent on backing her into a corner until she caved and said yes to his proposal.

If she couldn't outsmart Gorman while his guard was down, she might actually end up trapped in that marriage, chained to a man she didn't love.

But worse-far worse-was the gnawing truth eating at her. Gorman didn't give a damn about her two kids.

He had even had the gall to say he wished Zander was out of the picture for good.

If she brought her children to live under Gorman's roof, the thought of what might happen to them down the

line made her blood run cold.

While Linsey wrestled with that bone-deep fear, the two kids in the corner were wrapped up in their own heated, whispered showdown.

Zenia had just mumbled her hesitant story when Zander shot back, his voice tight as a coiled spring "I'm nothing like that bastard! He's the one picking on Mommy! I'd only ever protect her. I'm not like him, not one

bit!"

Zenia chewed on that for a second, her little face scrunched in thought, before she ventured cautiously, "Zander, I don't know... when I saw that bad man, I couldn't shake it. He kinda looks like you."

"No way!" Zander hissed, his face scrunching up like he had bitten into a sour lemon. "I'm Mommy's kid, so I only look like her!"

Zenia, all serious, retorted, "Everyone says I'm the one who looks like Mommy. She was my spitting image when she was little."

Zander huffed, practically vibrating with annoyance, but as the big brother, he reined it in, not about to blow his top at his little sister.

Instead, his frustration zeroed in on Collin like a heat-seeking missile. Zander clenched his hands and said angrily, "That terrible, evil man! I'll let him know who's in charge! See whether he dares to harass Mommy once more.

Zenia intervened abruptly and sternly, saying, "Remember, Zander? Gorman cautioned us about approaching the villain. The bad guy will take us away from Mommy."

Chapter 764 Is It Dolores Again

Zander clenched his teeth, his voice steady and full of fire. "I'm my mom's son, and I'm not going anywhere with that man. If he touches me, he'll regret it. I swear!"

Zenia's eyes lit up in awe. "Wow, Zander. You're really brave."

Zander beamed with pride. "Tomorrow, I'm marching straight to his office to give him a piece of my mind."

He turned to Zenia, his tone more serious now. "Stay right here and wait for me. If Mom asks where I went, just tell her."

"I'll just say I don't know!" Zenia cut in quickly.

Zander gave an approving nod. "Exactly. You're smart too!"

The next morning, Dustin walked into the company, looking dead on his feet.

*Collin glanced up as the door creaked open. "Where were you last night? Sneaking around?"

Dustin's eye twitched. "Sneaking around?"

He slumped into the chair across from Collin, face full of frustration. "I was up all night because of now you're throwing jabs? That's cold."

you,

Collin's face tensed for a moment. Then, without missing a beat, he snapped, "If your brain's still foggy, go

home and clear it. Don't bring your mess here."

He tapped his pen twice against the desk, sharp and deliberate. "You're lucky we don't have any big meetings today. One more screw-up, and you're on thin ice."

Dustin stiffened, alert now, the warning sinking in. He sat up straighter, his tone defensive. "I have a good reason for the way I'm acting."

Collin didn't even look up from his papers. "Is it Dolores again?"

Dustin flushed at the name, gaze drifting. "No... But she agreed to let me chase after her."

Collin scoffed coldly, "At this pace, I'll be six feet under before I see your wedding invitation." "Don't jinx it!" Dustin blurted, his ears turning pink. "If I stay focused, I can win her over soon."

Collin shot him a side glance. "If things are going so well, why didn't you sleep? Too happy to shut your eyes?" Dustin blinked, remembering the real reason he had come. "Collin, did you even hear what I said during our

call yesterday?"

He watched closely, hoping for any sign that Collin remembered.

Maybe Collin did have a past with someone... But the memory was buried too deep to reach

Still, Dustin couldn't let it go. He had seen a boy yesterday. The boy looked just like Collin. It wasn't the first time either. This was the second time.

As childhood friends, Dustin knew Collin's face like the back of his hand. He could spot even the slightest resemblance.

The first time, he told himself it was just a coincidence.

But seeing that boy again made his gut twist.

There was no brushing it off now.

That child might be Collin's son.

"What did you say again?" Collin asked, brows furrowed.

Dustin sighed. Collin never paid attention when he rambled. He always thought

Dustin was just full of odd ideas. But this time was different.

Chapter 765 Have You Ever Been With Another Wom...

Dustin jolted, a ripple of anxiety tightening his chest. "I saw a boy yesterday," he blurted, voice rising. "He looked exactly like you did as a kid-same face, same eyes, I'm telling you, it was uncanny."

Collin scoffed without lifting his eyes from the desk. "You still trapped in one of your dreams? Go back to your room and quit interrupting. I'm working."

But Dustin wasn't backing down. "Collin, I'm serious! I saw him at the hospital-he looks exactly like you! Anyone would say the same! He could be your son, I mean it!"

Then, as if searching for backup, he added hastily, "Dolores was there too. She saw him with her own eyes!"

That made Collin pause. A flicker of unease crossed his face. "You mentioned this in front of Dolores?"

Dustin frowned, caught off guard. "What are you getting at?"

Collin pinched the bridge of his nose, struggling to contain his irritation. "If you ran your mouth in front of her, she'll take it straight to Linsey. And the second Linsey hears even a whisper of this nonsense, she'll believe I've got some secret child stashed away somewhere."

Dustin stepped back, eyes narrowing. "Collin, I'm asking you plainly. Have you ever been with another woman?" Collin let out a slow breath and placed his pen down with finality. His voice was cold. "No. It's always been Linsey. So stop fabricating stories about me having a son."

Dustin faltered, his determination cracking under Collin's unwavering certainty.

Could the boy really have no connection at all?

Was such a resemblance merely coincidence?

A child bearing Collin's face... yet tied to none of his blood?

Before the silence could settle too deeply, a knock broke through the tension.

An assistant stepped inside, holding a folder in both hands. "Mr. Riley, we've retrieved the records-Ms. Brooks gave birth at a hospital abroad."

Dustin's heart dropped. He turned to Collin, trembling. "W-what? Linsey... gave birth overseas?"

Collin reached for the file instead of answering, flipping through it quickly, his eyes scanning every line with mounting tension.

The records confirmed it all. Each detail aligned with the scattered fragments of information he had pieced together over the months.

Until this moment, a small, desperate hope had fingered.

Maybe, just maybe, Linsey had already been pregnant with his child where had fed for drea

But the timeline shattered that hope. The documents left no space for denial tha hade en m pregnant until long after she had left

The child wasn't his.

Dustin watched Collin's face closely, unnerved by his silence. A storm of disbelief churned in his chest

Without warning, he reached forward and yanked the file from Collin's hands

He knew what the assistant had said, yet seeing it printed in black and white bit like a punch to the gut. Staring down at the file, his mind reeled. Linsey had a daughter.

He looked up, locking eyes with Collin's cold, steady gaze. His own mouth opened, but no words would come.

"You can leave now," Collin said flatly, glancing at the assistant.

The assistant gave a slight bow and slipped quietly out of the office.

Dustin was still staring at the papers trembling in his grip. How was this even possible?

"Enough." Collin extended his hand, calmly retrieved the file, and set it aside with a flick of indifference. "Linsey had a daughter," he said. "There's no reason to act so shocked."

Chapter 766 Is That Child Really Gorman's

Dustin studied Collin's face, searching for even a flicker of emotion-but found nothing. There was no anger or sadness, just that familiar unreadable calm.

After a pause, he ventured carefully, "Who is the father of Linsey's daughter?"

He didn't have to finish the question. Collin caught the thread. "Gorman claims he is the father."

His lids lifted a fraction, his voice calm and remote, as though recounting something insignificant. "I ran into the child again yesterday at the hospital. That makes it the third time now."

Only then did the memory snap into place for Dustin-the time he had seen Gorman at the airport, not long ago, accompanied by a little girl.

Back then, they had both remarked on how strikingly the child resembled Linsey.

So it was true. Linsey had a daughter. And that child... was Gorman's.

The realization hit him like a slow, rolling tide.

Four years had passed. Everything had changed.

Dustin just couldn't resist asking the question aloud. "Is that child really Gorman's?"

He glanced toward the stack of documents Collin had tossed aside earlier. "Those papers don't confirm paternity."

Collin gave a short nod. "No, they don't. But it doesn't matter. I've made my decision. I'm going after Linsey again."

A spark lit in Dustin's eyes. "You're serious? You're actually going to pursue her again?"

Collin's lips thinned into a firm line. "Yes."

"But... what about Gorman?" Dustin asked hesitantly, the uncertainty threading into his voice.

After all, Linsey and Gorman shared a child. Didn't that make them a family now?

"They're not married," Collin said flatly, cutting clean through the fog of implication. Gorman told me himself.

A muscle in Collin's jaw twitched, and for the first time, anger flashed in his eyes. "He let her raise a child on her own without marrying her. What kind of man does that? Irresponsible bastard."

A slow grin crept across Dustin's face. "Collin, this could be your window. Maybe she never even loved him. If she had, they would've tied the knot years ago. Four years-they had more than enough time for vows and a

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grand wedding."

At that, a faint, fleeting smile flickered across Collin's lips.

But Dustin frowned again. "Hold on... if you're planning to win Linsey back, does that mean you're giving up

Haven Walton?"

"Yes. My only courtesy toward Haven is out of respect for my grandmother."

"But the rumors are already swirling. Everyone thinks you're about to marry her. If Linsey hears that, she'll jump to the wrong conclusion again. You remember what happened yesterday at the restaurant-she asked about Haven, and you didn't exactly deny it."

Collin remained silent, like he was torn. Two seconds passed. Then, out of nowhere, he asked, "Have you heard anything about Joanne?"

Dustin looked taken aback. "Joanne? You mean Joanne Ellis? I remember she's close to Haven."

Collin leaned back slightly, his posture loosening as his tone turned almost leisurely. "She's been digging into Linsey... and anyone who's been close to Dolores lately."

Chapter 767 No One Bullied

Me

Dustin's curiosity flared the moment he heard Collin's words. "Why would Joanne check up on Dolores?"

Collin shot him a sharp look and corrected him quietly. "She's not after Dolores. She's digging into Linsey-the

one who sat beside Dolores yesterday."

"So it's Linsey she's focused on. Then why dig into Dolores?" Dustin muttered, suspicion creeping into his voice. A beat later, his eyes widened. He turned to Collin, stunned. "Wait... you hid Linsey's past in Grester. So, Haven doesn't know Linsey-the one we had dinner with-is your ex-wife?"

Collin gave a small nod. "Exactly. None of us mentioned Linsey's name last night. So naturally, Haven doesn't know she's also the designer Aurora."

Dustin felt his head spinning.

So much had happened in just thirty minutes, he could barely keep up.

He exhaled slowly. "Now I get it... You're trying to figure out Haven's real motive."

Collin laced his fingers, gaze dropping slightly. "Linsey hasn't forgiven me for what happened four years ago. Until I know where she stands, I don't want to push. I'm scared she'll vanish from Grester again... Just like last

time."

His lips pressed into a tight line. "If she truly doesn't want to be with me, I won't force it."

Dustin nodded thoughtfully, then made up his mind. "I'll ask Dolores about Linsey and her daughter if I can. Even if the child is Gorman's by blood, that doesn't mean you can't be the stepdad."

But Collin wasn't interested in the what-ifs. He raised a hand in quiet dismissal, signaling Dustin to leave.

At that moment, neither of them had the faintest idea what was unfolding downstairs in the lobby of CR Corporation.

"Oh my gosh, he looks just like Mr. Riley!"

"Could he really be Mr. Riley's son?"

"He's absolutely adorable!"

"Of course! With looks like Mr. Riley's, how could he not be?"

A small group of employees whispered among themselves, watching the scene from a distance.

A few bold ones had already approached, closing in on the stylish little boy.

"Hey there, cutie! Where's your mom? What are you doing here all by yourself?"

"Maybe his mom works here. What if she's Mr. Riley's secret lover?" someone teased with a grin.

"With a brain like that, you should be writing movies!"

Zander stood in the middle of them, arms folded tightly. His cap sat low over his eyes, and sunglasses dangled from his shirt collar. With his layered outfit and confident pose, he looked like a pint-sized fashion model with

attitude.

"I'm here to take down the bad man," he said, voice small but serious.

The crowd melted at his tone, finding him even more adorable.

"Bad man? Who's bothering you, little guy?"

Zander sniffed and lifted his chin. "No one bullied me. I said I'm here to take down the bad man!"

His boldness made everyone laugh.

"Alright then! But you have to tell us who he is first. Otherwise, how can we help?" Zander replied, loud and clear, "Collin Riley!"

Chapter 768 Let Me Down

right now!

As the words left Zander's mouth, a collective gasp swept through the lobby.

Whispers sparked like wildfire. Eyes widened. Curious glances darted from one face to another.

That boy must be connected to Collin!

Calling Collin a bad man? Could it mean Collin had an affair with the kid's mother?

The rumors hung thick in the air-juicy, shocking, and impossible to ignore.

Just then, Dustin's confused voice cut through the buzz. "What's going on here?"

The crowd turned on him the second he stepped into view. A few quick voices piped up. "Mr. Wade! There's a

kid here who looks exactly like Mr. Riley!"

Dustin's brows shot up. A kid who looked like Collin?

He turned toward the source-and froze. It was the same little boy he saw at the hospital just yesterday.

Without missing a beat, a glint of determination flashed in Dustin's eyes. He marched straight toward the child, scooped him up, and slung him over his shoulder.

"Ah!" Zander yelped, caught off guard. Before he could wiggle free, Dustin was already striding away with him.

"Who are you? Let go of me! You're a bad guy! I'm calling the police!" Zander shouted, fear flashing in his chest, though he tried to sound brave.

The employees stood frozen, jaws slack, watching Dustin march off with the struggling boy.

"Now Collin can't deny it. I've got proof!" Dustin muttered, a crooked smile forming.

Fueled by triumph, he hauled Zander upstairs, skipping past knocks or greetings, and burst straight into

Collin's office.

"Collin! Look what I found!" he yelled, voice echoing off the walls.

Collin flinched at the sudden interruption. His expression darkened in annoyance.

He opened his mouth to scold Dustin, but stopped cold at the sound of the boy's angry cry. "Bad person! You're bad too! Put me down!"

Collin looked up, startled. A small child-four or five at most-was draped over Dustin's shoulder, squirming

furiously.

His frown deepened. "Dustin, are you out of your mind?"

"Just look," Dustin said, turning the boy so Collin could see his face.

For a moment, time seemed to freeze. Two faces hung in the air-one older and sharp, the other younger and soft. Yet the resemblance was undeniable.

Collin's breath caught. His eyes locked on the boy's face. A strange tightness curled in his chest.

He couldn't say a word.

Zander glared at them both, tiny fists clenched. "Bad people! You're both bad! You planned this together!" He began to thrash again, face red and flustered. "Let me down right now!"

Seeing the boy's distress, Collin rose to his feet. His conflicted gaze lingered on him. "Dustin, put him down." "I'm not letting him run off again. He's slipped away from me twice already," Dustin said firmly.

Then he leaned in slightly, voice low with victory. "Now, do you believe me, Collin? Look at him. He's the spitting image of you!"

Zander scrunched his face in disgust. "I do not look like that bad man! You're all big bullies! I'm calling the police!"

Chapter 769 I Don't Have

A Dad!

Dustin kept his cool, steering the moment with ease. "Kid, do you even know who you're talking to? This man

is the founder of CR Corporation-the richest man in the entire country. If the police ever laid a hand on him, half of Grester's economy would crash overnight."

He sighed, muttering under his breath, "Why am I even explaining this to a toddler?"

Zander's cheeks puffed up with anger. "I'm not a toddler! Stop talking to me like I'm some baby!"

Collin's eyes narrowed. Something unreadable flickered behind them. He walked toward the boy. His gaze was sharp, focused. "Then tell me-how old are you?" His voice was calm but firm.

Dustin perked up, curious now. He leaned in a little, waiting for Zander's answer. Judging the boy's age by appearance alone was no easy task.

Zander didn't budge. His mind was full of memories-painful ones-of how this "bad man" had treated his mom.

He had no intention of playing along.

Instead, he crossed his arms and turned his head sharply to the side, letting out a cold sneer in defiance.

Dustin chuckled, shaking his head. "Well, well. This kid's got a lot of fire in him."

Still, both men knew better than to push too hard. Forcing answers out of a child wouldn't get them far.

Collin looked over at Dustin after a pause. "Take him to the sofa. I'll talk to him once he's calmed down."

Before Dustin could respond, Zander shouted, "I'm not talking to you! You're a bad guy!"

Dustin's brow twitched. He drew in a slow breath, clearly trying to stay patient. "Listen, kid. I heard what you said downstairs. You came here looking for Collin, didn't you? Well, here he is. Speak now, or we'll call the police. Then you'll be answering questions down at the station."

Though he mostly meant it to scare him, the words struck a real nerve.

Zander's face lost some color.

The idea of being taken to the police station sent a chill down his spine.

"I didn't do anything wrong! You can't call the police on me!" Zander yelled, trying to sound brave.

Dustin didn't let up. "You barged into our company and caused a scene. People couldn't even work. Why shouldn't we report you? You've got guts, I'll give you that—standing up to Collin. But once you leave here, ask around. No one in Grester dares to mess with the founder of CR Corporation."

He leaned in slightly, lowering his voice. "Didn't your dad ever teach you that?"

Zander's face twisted with clear irritation. "I don't have a dad! And I don't need one! Dads just cause trouble!"

Then he shot a glare at both men "And you two are no better!"

Despite his fieres tone, the softness of his features made his anger seem more pouty than powerful.

Collin and Dustin had faced tougher storms. A child's tantrum wasn't going to shake them.

Still, Zander's words landed like tiny pebbles in still water-rippling just enough to leave an effect.

Dustin glanced at Collin, a weight behind his stare, Collin met his gaze and understood at once.

Chapter 770 Didn't You Come Here To Challenge...

There was no father in sight.

Earlier, Dustin had steered clear of asking about the child's mother, hoping

instead to uncover the boy's father.

Now, with that answer dangling plainly between the lines, the truth felt even more probable-this little guy had

to be Collin's son.

Still, the mystery deepened. Who had brought this boy into the world?

Collin had insisted he had only ever been with Linsey.

So then, where had this child come from?

Pushing for answers now felt wrong. Collin made the conscious choice to stay quiet, realizing that bringing up something so sensitive could cut deeper than intended. The absence of a father was already a heavy weight for

a child to carry.

He didn't want to add salt to that wound.

Leaning in, Collin asked in a voice gentler than usual, "Did you come all the way here just to see me?"

Chin held high and eyes blazing with purpose, Zander replied, "You bet I did! I came to challenge you, you

mean man!"

Dustin tried to keep it in, but the boy's fiery declaration cracked his composure. Laughter slipped out before he

could stop it.

Face flushed and fuming, Zander began to wriggle furiously. "Hey! You back there! Let me go! You're laughing at a kid! That makes you a terrible grown-up!"

It dawned on Dustin-he never imagined he would be trading barbs with someone barely tall enough to reach

the counter.

"Oh, so you do know you're just a kid?" Dustin arched an eyebrow, lips twitching with amusement. "Then act like one. Who told you it was smart to come pick fights with grown-ups?"

Without much effort, he scooped Zander off the floor like a bag of groceries, prompting the boy to yelp twice in startled protest. "Look at that. One hand. I don't even need both. Come back when you've got some height on you, little warrior."

Zander couldn't wriggle free. Every squirm only made it more obvious-he was completely outmatched.

Being so easily manhandled by Dustin made his chest burn with humiliation.

Heat rushed to his cheeks as his emotions tangled-shame, fury, and helplessness all colliding at once.
The 7

more he dwelled on his failure, the heavier the weight of disappointment became. He hadn't even managed to stand up for his mom.

A few tears betrayed him, slipping down his face and landing directly on Dustin's hand.

Startled, Dustin recoiled a little. "Hey, hey-what's this now? Don't cry! You win, okay? Just-stop with the waterworks. Kid tears give me a damn headache."

With a helpless glance, he turned toward Collin, silently asking for backup.

Rather than responding, Collin stood motionless, eyes narrowed and fixed on Zander as though he were decoding some complex equation.

It seemed even Collin wasn't equipped to deal with a sobbing child.

That was what Dustin figured, still clueless that Collin's thoughts had already wandered miles away.

As he looked at Zander's tear-streaked face and red eyes, Collin's thoughts drifted to Linsey. Strange-why did

this child remind him so much of her?

That sudden realization jerked Collin back to the present.

Without a word, he stepped forward and gently lifted Zander from Dustin's arms.

"I've got him," he said while adjusting the boy's weight more comfortably. "He must feel uncomfortable that

way."

Zander blinked, caught off guard by the shift. Before he could react, he found himself resting against Collin's

chest.

A reflex had him wriggling in protest, but Collin's composed tone halted his movement. "Didn't you come here to challenge me?" he asked. "Let's settle it, man to man."

Zander stiffened, clearly startled by the offer. His wide eyes scanned Collin's serious expression, and his voice softened as he responded, "I want that duel."