

Zillionaire 941

Chapter 941:

“These show your purchase of a military-style knife from an underground market. Date, time, price, and tax receipt are all clearly documented. This knife matches the one Kylee carried that day.”

Haven’s face drained of color, her jaw tightening as Linsey presented this damning evidence.

Even Kase, previously radiating irritation, now looked stunned. He turned to Haven, struggling to process her connection to Gorman’s death.

That Haven had played a role in such a vile act was bad enough. Her carelessness in leaving such clear evidence was beyond reckless.

Rage churned within Kase, barely contained.

Were it not for Linsey and Collin’s presence, he might have lashed out at Haven’s foolishness.

She really was a fool.

How had their family produced such a blatant fool?

Linsey, observing Haven’s and Kase’s reactions, pulled up another piece of evidence.

She said, “Three days before the incident, you sent Joanne to the prison on your behalf. You spent heavily to secure Kylee’s brief release, then met her yourself to hash out the details. That meeting happened right here in this restaurant. A staff member saw you and Kylee enter the same private room. Surveillance footage backs this up.”

A soft, almost taunting chuckle slipped from Linsey’s lips. “You took pains to disguise yourself. Black wool coat, hat, and mask. I nearly didn’t recognize you.”

Cold sweat now dotted Haven's forehead.

Linsey's evidence was airtight, rendering any defense feeble.

She stood powerless as Linsey methodically tore her apart.

"But you missed one thing," Linsey went on, her tone smooth yet cutting. "Your earrings. They're the latest from a luxury brand, sold at just three stores in Grester. Each keeps detailed buyer records. Besides you, only three other young women and one movie star in this city own them."

Haven gave a bitter grin, her lips curling into a sarcastic twist. Her voice cracked with fury as she snapped, "So you're completely sure it was me in that surveillance footage?"

Linsey responded smoothly, "Isn't it strange? On that exact day, the movie star was overseas on a shoot, and those three young women were off jet-setting together, like they always do."

She paused for emphasis before continuing, "I'm no specialist when it comes to jewelry, so I had no clue if the earrings were real or fake. That's why I tracked down the original designer—the one who actually made them—to get some answers. And guess what? The woman in that restaurant footage was wearing the real thing."

Haven's breathing turned uneven, her chest rising and falling in sharp waves.

Her mind kept telling her that insisting any further was pointless.

Still, a fierce unwillingness to back down burned inside her.

Why did Linsey always end up ahead?

She had spent so long laying out every detail of her plan, only to collapse right before reaching the finish line—the most important step of all!

Why was it Linsey who came out unscathed that day? Why did everything seem to go her way?

“What’s the point of arguing at this stage? I’m not admitting to anything. Everything you’re saying is a lie! You’re making all of it up!”

Chapter 942:

Rage flared in Haven’s eyes as she shot Linsey a look cold enough to stop a heartbeat. With clenched teeth, she shouted, “Kylee was the one who committed that murder, not me! Don’t even think about tying me to what she did!”

Linsey had expected this exact reaction. “I already know that, and so do the police. They’ve confirmed Kylee was the killer. But are you aware that convincing a prisoner to carry out a murder is still a serious offense? And more than that, the military-grade knives you bought in secret were never meant for civilian use, yet you acquired one specifically to kill. When you add those charges to the theft of that expensive necklace, you’re looking at several years behind bars.”

Everything around Haven seemed to stop as her thoughts spiraled in shock.

Her knees gave out, and she collapsed onto the sofa, her entire body trembling uncontrollably.

Kase lowered his eyes and shut them slowly, overwhelmed by what he had just witnessed.

Everything had fallen apart. His granddaughter’s life was completely destroyed.

Linsey quietly slipped her phone into her pocket and glanced at the clock. “If I’m right, the police should be arriving any moment now.”

Haven’s eyes flew open, locking onto Linsey, her voice shaking as she asked, “What did you just say?”

Linsey replied with a steady chill in her voice, "We gave all of the evidence to the police before we even came here. With the kind of access they have, they'll uncover even more than we did. If you still have even the slightest trace of regret, the smartest thing you can do now is turn yourself in. It might earn you some mercy."

Suddenly, Haven broke into a fit of laughter, her bloodshot eyes spilling fresh tears.

She laughed through her tears, eyes never leaving Linsey. "You went through all that effort to dig up the truth—wasn't it all for Gorman's sake? Can't you see it, Linsey? On the day you and Gorman were picking out your wedding clothes, I wasn't the only one plotting. Gorman planned to use that same moment to take Collin's life!"

Tears welled up in Haven's eyes as she turned her gaze toward Collin, her voice thick with pain.

"Collin, every move I made was to protect you! If I hadn't sent Kylee to take out Linsey first, Gorman would've had his people kill you! You'd be lying in a grave right now! I did it all for you! How could you turn your back on me like this?"

The gleam in Collin's eyes turned mean, sharper than before. Even though Haven swore she was doing it all for him, her grudge against Linsey was far too personal to disguise as concern.

He honestly couldn't tell if Haven was being cruel on purpose or if her stupidity had simply reached new heights.

"Keep talking. When the cops get here, make sure you tell them everything. Let's see if they'll toss out our evidence in favor of your ridiculous little fairy tale," said Collin, his voice cold as stone.

Those words hit Haven like a punch to the gut. Panic clawed at her chest before she could stop it.

No excuse she gave would sway him now. His mind was made up, and her lies were worthless.

Collin didn't care if she spent the rest of her life behind bars. She meant nothing to him anymore.

What was worse, the woman she had tried to kill was the only one Collin truly cared about. There was no way he would let her off. That realization twisted inside her like a knife. Her lips lifted into a sour smile.

She didn't need to ask for forgiveness. It would never come.

Chapter 943:

Just then, the door burst open, and a Walton servant stumbled in, clearly shaken.

"Mr. Walton, Ms. Walton—the police are here!"

"What?!" Haven whipped around, her face draining of all color.

Within seconds, officers flooded into the room.

"Haven Walton, you're under suspicion for the illegal purchase of a custom military weapon and colluding with a known criminal to commit attempted murder. You'll need to come with us."

Two of them closed in, locking cold cuffs around her wrists.

Haven's scream pierced through the room. "No! That's a lie! They're setting me up!"

Wild-eyed and thrashing, she pointed toward Linsey. "It was her! She's behind all of this! She killed Gorman, not me! Why are you arresting me?! Go after her!"

From the corner, Joanne had been quietly watching it all unfold. For just a second, her expression betrayed her—a flicker of disbelief breaking through her calm.

The possibility that Linsey and Collin would actually involve the authorities hadn't even crossed her mind. She thought they were bluffing.

Given Collin's status as the man behind CR Corporation, it made sense he had no fear.

But Linsey? She had no wealth. No backing. Nothing.

That was why Joanne was stunned that Linsey showed no fear. Not even a flicker of doubt crossed her face. Once she lost Collin's support, she would have to face the wrath of the Waltons alone. Had that thought never crossed her mind?

As that question sank in, Joanne found her thoughts drifting to someone else entirely—Jeffery.

Linsey's features weren't just familiar. They mirrored Jeffery's almost exactly. That resemblance sparked a new suspicion in Joanne, one too striking to ignore. There had to be something deeper tying Linsey to the Lawson family.

Joanne's memory stirred with the image of Carol—gone now, killed in an accident four years back.

Whispers from the upper circles came back to her too. Some claimed Carol had never truly belonged to the Lawson family by blood.

Given Linsey's uncanny similarity to Jeffery, the idea clicked into place. Linsey might actually be the real daughter of the Lawson family.

Meanwhile, Kase stood amid the tension, fury and helplessness twisting inside him like a storm.

He rose shakily to his feet, clearly torn, as though he wanted to speak up and say something to the officers. But the words never came. In the end, he held back, unwilling to further drag the Walton name through the mud.

Haven was, after all, one of their own—and her behavior had already stained the family's reputation.

So Kase made his choice. He decided it was best to cut ties entirely.

With a sharp, bitter snort, he turned his back on her, not bothering to say a single word. The silence that followed was louder than anything he could have said. Leaning on a servant for support, he slowly made his way up the stairs.

“Grandpa! Please save me! Grandpa!” Haven’s voice cracked as she watched him walk away, a cold dread sinking deep into her bones.

Everything had started crumbling the moment the Walton family realized who Collin really was. Once his identity as CR Corporation’s founder came to light, their treatment of her had changed overnight. She had scraped and clawed her way into their good graces, using every trick she knew to get close to Collin.

Chapter 944:

Now it was all gone.

Her voice broke as Haven shouted through the lump in her throat, “Collin! How could you let this happen? Gorman was going to kill you! If he hadn’t died, you’d be the one buried now! That day at the bridal shop—they had people everywhere! You think you would’ve walked away alive without me?”

Haven shouted, her voice rough and cracking like broken glass, “You! Linsey! Don’t think you’ve beaten me! This is just one loss!” Her bloodshot eyes blazed with fury, wild and unhinged.

The police made their way toward the door, taking her with them.

Linsey and Collin rose to their feet together. Their cold eyes followed Haven, who was still fighting against the officers.

Linsey felt drained. She had no more words to spare.

She had stayed behind on purpose, just to see Haven taken away. To her, the silence now said more than anything she could have added. She knew Haven would never listen, not with the hatred she carried. Back at the bridal shop, if Gorman hadn’t stepped in, she might not be alive today.

So, for herself—and for Gorman, who had died because of her—she could never forgive Haven.

Suddenly, Collin's hand slipped into hers. It was firm, yet gentle. Startled, Linsey turned to look at him. His warm, steady eyes locked with hers.

He gave her a faint smile. Then, turning to Haven, his smile vanished, replaced by ice.

Collin said, "You're wrong. Did you really think I got there without a plan? From the moment you invited me to that bridal shop, I already knew what I was going to do. Once I saw Linsey wasn't marrying Gorman by choice, I was ready to take her with me—no matter what."

Haven's face changed. Her eyes widened in shock.

That was when it hit her.

From the start, when Collin founded CR Corporation, Gorman had always seen him as his biggest threat.

But all these years, Gorman had never managed to surpass him.

Grester had always been Collin's stronghold.

It wasn't a place Gorman could win.

A bitter laugh escaped Haven's lips.

Now she understood. That day at the shop, Collin had come prepared. He rejected her invitation on purpose—then showed up with his men, outnumbering Gorman's. All he needed was to figure out whether Linsey was willingly marrying Gorman.

Haven stopped fighting. Her body slumped, and the fire in her eyes faded. The police led her away in silence.

Linsey was still stunned by Collin's words. Her eyes lingered on him, shining softly.

Soon after, they both left together.

Only Joanne remained at the Walton family's estate. She had been so quiet on the couch, it was easy to forget she was even there. She watched Linsey walk away, her expression unreadable.

After a long pause, Joanne let out a slow sigh. The memory of Haven's fall from grace left a strange feeling in her chest.

She knew that with Collin's sharp mind, it wouldn't take long before he uncovered the truth—that she had secretly helped Haven more than once.

But today, he hadn't said a word to her, not even casting her a glance. Maybe she was overthinking. Maybe he didn't know.

Chapter 945:

Still, her thoughts spun between Linsey's calm face and Collin's cold gaze. Her heart grew restless.

Just as she was about to stand, a commanding voice echoed from the stairs. "Joanne, right? Come upstairs. I want to talk to you."

It was Kase. Joanne froze. She had never expected Kase, who had always acted like she didn't exist, to speak to her—especially now that Haven was gone.

Joanne parted her lips and whispered, "Alright."

She pivoted away, each step toward the staircase heavier than the last as dread coiled within her.

Her thoughts spiraled into a maelstrom of dark possibilities.

Though Collin hadn't sought retribution, she trembled at the thought of Kase exacting vengeance for Haven's downfall.

A flicker of indignation rose in Joanne's chest.

Throughout everything, she had merely been Haven's accomplice, never the architect of their schemes. Haven had chosen her own path; she had never forced her hand.

The plot involving Kylee in the attempt on Linsey's life—that had been Haven's creation entirely.

Joanne had simply facilitated, gathering intelligence about Linsey and Kylee's history and arranging Kylee's temporary release.

This peripheral involvement had kept Joanne beyond the reach of law enforcement.

Even so, Joanne couldn't shake her nervousness.

Kase, though not as formidable as Collin, still wielded enough power as head of the Walton family to destroy someone as insignificant as her without a second thought.

With Haven in police custody, Joanne had lost her only shield in Grester.

Beyond her ambitions, she was merely an ordinary woman with no distinguished background to leverage.

Without her persistent efforts to forge something better, she faced the prospect of settling into predictable patterns: marrying an average man and disappearing into the comfortable anonymity of an ordinary existence.

When Joanne entered Kase's private study, her heart still raced beneath her composed exterior.

She lifted her gaze to meet his—sharp, assessing eyes that seemed to see through pretense.

“Haven is no longer of any use,” he stated coolly. “You’re her closest friend, so why not step in and take on her role?”

Joanne's eyes widened, momentary surprise breaking through her careful composure. “Mr. Walton, what did you just say?”

Kase continued undeterred, as if her reaction were expected and unremarkable. “You have two options before you. Regardless of which one you choose, I will ensure your family receives generous benefits and treatment. You won’t be shortchanged. First, agree to assume the identity of a Walton and marry into one of Grester’s elite families to secure a new path for us. The second option...”

“What’s the second option?” Joanne asked, her voice quieter now, tinged with cautious curiosity.

Kase released a soft, menacing laugh that seemed to chill the air between them. “Take Haven’s place in prison.”

Chapter 946:

The declaration struck Joanne like winter wind, leaving a hollow ringing in her ears.

“No,” she gasped, shaking her head with instinctive vehemence. “I won’t go to prison for Haven! Mr. Walton, you can’t do this...” Her voice caught, then strengthened. “You know as well as I do that I could never control Haven. Once she fixed her mind on something, it became immovable as stone.”

Kase's lips curled into a contemptuous smile. "She's nothing but a fool," he remarked, each word precise and cutting. "Who cares about her decisions? The world judges outcomes, not intentions. Unfortunately, she possessed cleverness without wisdom."

His eyes narrowed as he studied Joanne with the clinical interest of a collector assessing an acquisition. "You lack Haven's striking presence, but caution serves better than beauty in delicate matters. That's precisely why you might prove valuable where she failed."

The silence between them grew weighted before he added with silken mockery, "I trust you're sensible enough to recognize which choice preserves your future?"

Joanne's expression slackened, her consciousness retreating as if to shield itself from this brutal revelation.

Never had she imagined Kase's indifference toward Haven could run so bone-deep, so absolute.

The truth crystallized with terrible clarity—Haven had never been family, merely a token advanced and withdrawn according to utility. How many nights had Joanne lain awake, envying Haven's circumstances?

Now, looking through the tarnished reality, she felt nothing but a profound, aching pity for the woman.

"Mr. Walton, do you seriously expect me to get close to Collin? You saw it yourself—Collin only has eyes for Linsey," Joanne said, laughing awkwardly.

Before she could say more, Kase cut in coolly. "Collin isn't the only powerful man in Grester."

Joanne's eyes lit up. "You mean..."

Kase interrupted again. "Of course. I'm talking about Dustin Wade—the one who helps Collin run CR Corporation."

At Grester's biggest amusement park, Dolores trudged behind Dustin, completely worn out. Dustin, on the other hand, carried Zenia and Zander with ease.

"You two little rascals, what do you want to play next?" he asked cheerfully.

Dolores nearly groaned. Just hearing that made her soul sink.

If she had known babysitting would be this draining, she would have rather faced those stubborn board members at the company. At least they didn't run around.

She made up her mind—once they got back, Linsey owed her big time.

"I'm hungry," Zenia said, patting her tummy.

As soon as he heard that, Zander lost all interest in playing. "Dustin, Zenia's hungry. Let's go get food!"

Dolores perked up instantly.

Thank goodness. Finally, a break.

Dustin raised a brow. "No problem. What do you feel like eating?"

After hearing the kids' choices, Dustin turned to Dolores. "How about you? Want anything?"

"I'm fine with anything," she replied with a faint smile.

At this point, all she wanted was a place to sit and breathe.

Chapter 947:

They headed to a nearby restaurant inside the park.

Once seated, Dustin ordered two kids' meals.

"What about you, Dolores?" he asked, glancing up from the menu.

Dolores wiped sweat off Zenia's face and replied softly, "Just a cold drink is fine."

"I've noticed you've been liking blueberries lately. Want to try the blueberry juice here?" Dustin suggested.

Dolores paused, surprised. Dustin always came off so carefree, yet he noticed the little things.

"Sure, sounds nice."

Dustin added a few more dishes.

Soon, the waiter brought everything over.

Naturally, both adults attended to the kids first.

Thankfully, Linsey had taught them well. They ate neatly, without much fuss.

Seeing that the kids were doing fine, Dustin grabbed a plate of fruit salad, gave it a little mix, and placed it in front of Dolores. "You must be worn out. I know your appetite isn't great when you're tired. Start with this. If you're still hungry later, we'll order more."

Dolores glanced down at the salad.

She had noticed earlier that it could be customized.

To her surprise, Dustin had picked all the fruits she liked, with just the right dressing.

“Thank you,” she said, smiling softly at him.

Ever since they acknowledged their feelings, Dustin had stopped hiding how he felt. He always knew how to make her smile with the smallest gestures.

At first, Dolores planned to play hard to get—to test his patience a little longer before saying yes.

But now, she could barely wait to be his.

Dolores couldn’t help but smile at the thought.

“Dolores, you look so happy! Do you really like the salad Dustin made for you?” Zenia said, her tone full of innocent curiosity.

Startled, Dolores quickly masked her expression and replied in mock irritation, “You little rascal, what kind of nonsense is that?”

Her eyes drifted around until they landed on Dustin’s relaxed smile. Her heart gave a sudden flutter.

Zander spoke up seriously. “Dolores, my mom always says if you like something, you should say it out loud. If not, no one will ever know.”

Dolores blinked. “Linsey told you that?”

That didn’t sound like something Linsey would say.

It caught her off guard.

As they continued eating, laughter and light chatter filled the table. The mood was warm, like sunshine on a quiet afternoon.

But that peace shattered like glass.

“Dustin! What do you think you’re doing?” A sharp voice rang out.

Dustin turned in surprise. “Mom? What are you doing here?”

Dolores’ heart jumped. She quickly looked over.

Chapter 948:

An elegant woman walked toward them, her steps firm and her aura commanding. Several tall bodyguards followed close behind.

“You actually have the nerve to ask?” Hester Wade shot Dustin a glare, then turned her cold, assessing eyes on Dolores. She gave a disdainful snort before narrowing her gaze at Zenia and Zander. “Don’t tell me these kids are your secret illegitimate children.”

Dolores’ expression changed immediately.

Without a second thought, she gently placed her hand over Zenia’s ears, trying to block out the cruel words.

Back when Gorman had held Zenia captive, some kids had mocked her background. But those taunts were nothing compared to this.

The word “illegitimate” cut far deeper.

Dustin stood up sharply, anger in his voice. “Mom, how can you say that in front of the kids?”

Though clearly upset, he kept his tone low. “They’re not mine. They’re Collin’s.”

“Collin’s?” Hester raised a brow with a hint of surprise. “Well, if they’re Collin’s, it’s fine to help out.”

Her tone turned mocking as she looked Dolores up and down. “But don’t tell me you’re taking care of Collin’s girl too. That would be quite the scandal.”

Her words were like ice, and Dolores felt it in her chest.

In that moment, everything became clear.

Hester knew. She had come prepared.

She didn’t see Dolores as a threat—just someone beneath her notice. It was obvious Hester was against their relationship from the start.

Dolores could see where this was headed. If Dustin kept arguing, things would only get worse.

And she couldn’t stand the thought of the kids being dragged into the mess. Nor could she let Dustin fight with his mother because of her.

Dustin looked at Hester in disbelief. “Mom, it’s not like that. She’s...”

“Mr. Wade,” Dolores suddenly cut in, using a formal tone that stopped him in his tracks.

Dolores inhaled deeply, mustering a faint grin. “I really appreciate everything today. If you have other commitments, feel free to head out. I can manage getting the kids home on my own.”

Dustin froze for a moment, pivoting to face Dolores with a look of astonishment.

Her words left him puzzled, unsure of her intent. He also couldn't grasp why she seemed to cut him off from saying more.

Since Hester had just spotted them together, Dustin had hoped to properly introduce Dolores to her.

But Dolores, in Hester's presence, intentionally kept her distance from him.

Noticing Dustin's confusion, Dolores could easily sense the thoughts swirling in his mind.

Yet, under the circumstances, this was the only way she could safeguard her fragile sense of pride.

With that resolve, Dolores didn't waver any longer. She gently clasped Zenia's hand, who still seemed a bit lost, and softly said, "Come on, Zenia, let's head home."

She kept her tone calm and gave a small wave to Zander. "Zander, let's go."

Dustin's posture stiffened slightly, his gaze tinged with quiet sorrow as it lingered on Dolores.

Chapter 949:

He could tell she was avoiding his eyes.

Recalling Hester's recent words, Dustin slowly averted his gaze, concealing the heaviness within.

He stayed silent, making no move to stop Dolores as she left with the children.

After a moment, Dustin turned to Hester, who wore a faint, mocking smirk, and asked in a raspy voice, “Mom, why?”

Hester didn’t respond right away. Instead, she curtly ordered, “Let’s go home.”

Dustin clenched his jaw in frustration, itching to clear things up with Hester immediately.

But reflecting on her years of devoted care and guidance, he swallowed his irritation.

“Alright,” he muttered, nodding reluctantly.

When Dolores reached Collin’s place with the two kids, Linsey and Collin were still busy preparing dinner in the kitchen.

“You’re back, Dolores!” Spotting them, Linsey slipped off her apron, wiped her hands, and approached with a warm smile.

“Mommy!” Zenia and Zander bounded into Linsey’s arms, cuddling close with carefree joy. “We missed you so much!”

“I missed you both too,” Linsey replied, her face lighting up as she returned their affection. Then, glancing up, she noticed the distant look clouding Dolores’ expression.

After more than twenty years of friendship, Linsey instantly knew something was wrong.

Her eyes flicked to the closed door behind Dolores and she realized Dustin hadn’t returned with them.

That confirmed it—Dustin was at the heart of the issue.

Collin emerged, carrying plates of food to the table.

Linsey shot him a subtle glance.

Catching her cue, Collin took the kids' hands. "Alright, you two, let's go wash our hands."

"Collin, Zander says you're our dad. Is that true?" Zenia asked innocently, following him to the bathroom.

Zander corrected her, "Zenia, you should call him Daddy."

Collin chuckled softly. "No worries, call me whatever feels right." The bathroom door clicked shut.

Linsey gently took Dolores' hand, pulling her back from her drifting thoughts. "Dolores, what's going on?"

Dolores blinked, snapping back to the moment, and forced a weak smile. "Linsey, I'm suddenly feeling under the weather. I think I need to rest for a bit."

Although Dolores had a smile on her face, Linsey could tell—there was no joy in her eyes.

She looked completely downhearted.

Linsey pressed her lips together and gently pulled Dolores inside. "Collin and I just hired a lovely housekeeper. The guest room is all tidy now, fresh sheets and everything. You should go lie down for a bit."

Dolores hesitated, her voice low. She wanted to say no.

Linsey and Collin had only just gotten back together. Dolores didn't want to be a bother.

But Linsey held her hand tightly. Her voice dropped as she said, "Dolores, you can't fool me. I know you too well."

She looked down, her warm fingers brushing over the back of Dolores' cold hand.

Chapter 950:

"When I hit rock bottom, you were right there beside me. Now it's your turn. You're hurting—I'm not about to let you face it alone."

Linsey paused, then continued softly, "Remember four years ago? When your company ran into trouble, you kept it from me. You didn't want me to worry. And when I found out, I was mad. You promised you'd never shut me out again."

Dolores looked at her in silence. Her eyes were wet, but no tears had fallen yet.

"Thank you, Linsey," she murmured.

Linsey smiled gently and touched her cheek. "I haven't even done anything yet," she said with a soft laugh.

Then she took Dolores' hand and led her to the guest room.

The door shut quietly behind them, shutting the world out.

"Collin said he's cooking something special," Linsey said as she poured a glass of water. "I was helping, but I left him to it. The kids are with the housekeeper, so we're free to rest."

With Linsey there, a weight lifted off Dolores' chest.

She took the water, sipped quietly, then slipped off her coat and lay on the bed without a word. Her eyes closed. Linsey came around and lay down beside her.

The room fell silent.

Dolores didn't speak. Linsey didn't rush her. She simply waited.

No one knew how long had passed.

Just when Linsey thought Dolores had drifted off, she heard her whisper, "Linsey... I don't think Dustin and I have a future."

Linsey's heart skipped a beat.

So it was about Dustin after all.

No wonder he hadn't come here with them.

She turned to look at Dolores, her eyes gentle. "Why do you think that?" Something serious must have happened.

Did Dustin hurt her?

But that didn't sound like him. Dustin wasn't the type.

Dolores let out a shaky breath. Her voice wavered. "His mom saw us at the amusement park. I could tell she didn't like me. In fact, I think she looked down on me."

She turned her face away. Her eyes were red and glassy. "She thought Zenia and Zander were our kids. She called them..." Dolores's voice cracked. "She called them illegitimate children."

She broke off, and tears slipped down her cheeks. Her voice trembled. "Linsey. I'm so sorry. If it weren't for me, your children wouldn't have been called that."

The sight of Dolores in tears shattered something fragile within Linsey's chest.

Panic seized her as she reached out, fingertips trembling against the dampness on Dolores' cheeks while her own throat constricted with shared anguish.

"This isn't your fault, Dolores. Please don't blame yourself." Linsey's voice carried gentle urgency. "I'll explain everything to the children later, but you need to stop tearing yourself apart over this."

She changed the subject. "Did you see their faces when they walked through that door? Pure joy, radiating from every smile. You gave them something beautiful today, something they'll treasure."

Linsey's fingers moved soothingly through Dolores' hair, each gentle stroke meant to calm the storm raging within her.