

## **Zillionaire 971**

Chapter 971:

“Is that so?” Alissa asked, her eyes sharp with doubt.

To Alissa, Linsey was nothing but a sly woman. Gorman had fallen for her tricks more than once. That was why they couldn’t afford to lower their guard.

Linsey lifted her chin, her gaze steady. “Of course I’m serious. What’s the point of resisting when it won’t work?”

She looked Alissa in the eye. “Alissa, we’ve been talking for almost thirty minutes, and you haven’t tried to take me by force. That means you’re hoping I’ll agree on my own. IVF has come a long way, but without my cooperation, it won’t be easy. My mental state affects my body. If I resist, the chances of success drop.”

Her words hung heavy in the air.

Alissa and Bart didn’t argue, but their faces turned darker.

Alissa let out a dry laugh. “So all that talk was just to buy yourself a fair chance to speak?”

Her eyes narrowed. “Fine. Let’s hear what you’ve got—other than walking into that hospital like a good girl.”

Linsey turned to Collin. He looked tense, his brows drawn together. But when she gave him a small, reassuring smile, his expression eased. Though rage still burned in him, he nodded and sat back down, following her lead in silence.

Alissa and Bart returned to their seats, their faces betraying nothing but impatience as they stared at Linsey. They still couldn’t understand what Gorman saw in her. To them, she was just a cunning woman.

No matter how pretty or smart she was, she was a single mother. So why was Gorman so set on making her his?

Alissa clenched her thoughts and shot another cold glare at Linsey.

Unaware of Alissa's growing frustration, Linsey sat quietly for a moment before asking the Greens, "Why me? Why must I be the one to carry a child for your family?"

Just as she settled back into her seat, something began to feel off. A strange thought crossed her mind—Alissa and Bart seemed far too obsessed with her.

Alissa and Bart seemed resolute in their desire for Linsey to carry a child for the Green family.

If their bitterness toward her stemmed from the belief that she had played a role in Gorman's death, they should have wanted nothing to do with her—especially not something as intimate as bearing Gorman's child. Yet, their relentless push for her to conceive was unmistakable. They wielded every ounce of their authority and influence, pressuring both her and Collin to consent to an IVF procedure.

If Alissa and Bart were truly consumed by rage, they might have resorted to harsher actions. But instead, their focus remained firmly on Linsey giving birth to Gorman's child.

This fixation reminded Linsey of the time Gorman had been equally adamant about marrying her, stirring an unsettling sense of *déjà vu*. A chilling realization swept over her, sending shivers down her spine.

Alissa's eyes narrowed, and she hissed, "Linsey, are you sure you want to waste our time with such a ridiculous question? I've been clear from the beginning—you're the reason Gorman's gone. We're seeking closure. Don't you owe us that much?"

Bart's voice was cold as he added, "If you keep stalling, we'll have no choice but to drag you to the hospital ourselves. Whether your defiance complicates the procedure, we'll see when we get there."

With that, he reached for his phone to summon the men waiting outside.

In the tense silence that followed, Linsey suddenly asked, her tone flat, “The person waiting for me at the hospital—it’s not Gorman, is it?” Her words hung heavily in the air, and she noticed the sudden tightening in Alissa and Bart’s eyes.

Chapter 972:

It wasn’t the raw pain of reopened wounds she saw, but a flicker of panic—as if a hidden truth had been exposed.

Bart slammed his fist on the table, the sound echoing sharply. “Linsey, what are you implying? Have you lost your senses, or are you just trying to dodge your commitment by stirring up trouble?” he barked.

Alissa, her voice rough with disbelief, added, “Linsey, are you really going to keep dragging up the past? Gorman died saving you long ago. What nonsense is this? Are you saying this to avoid your responsibility?”

Collin, seated beside her, was momentarily stunned by her words. He turned to study Linsey’s face, his expression grave.

He could see she wasn’t joking or cruelly prodding at their grief—her demeanor was serious. A spark of realization flickered in Collin’s eyes, followed by the faintest trace of a smile.

He silently marveled at the cleverness of Gorman’s apparent scheme.

Linsey’s gaze dropped, her face unreadable. Alissa’s and Bart’s reactions only deepened her suspicions.

She began to believe Gorman might still be alive. Though she didn’t want to entertain such far-fetched hopes, a part of her longed for it to be true—even if it meant Gorman had spun an elaborate deception.

“Gorman must still be alive,” she said softly, lifting her eyes to meet theirs. “Your over-the-top reactions just now—it would have made more sense to kill me outright. You gave the wrong emotional response.”

Alissa and Bart stiffened, their faces freezing as they stared at Linsey, speechless.

“Since the news of Gorman’s death reached me, I’ve been grappling with doubt and disbelief. I never saw his body. Just days ago, Collin sent someone to investigate, and they reported that Gorman’s loyal men were guarding his remains, refusing access to anyone until you both arrived in Grester,” Linsey said, her voice steady, her thoughts sharpening with every word.

A faint smile curved her lips as she continued, “I know some of Gorman’s men resented me, believing I was ungrateful and didn’t appreciate his devotion. But what struck me as odd was that after his supposed death, none of them confronted me. They simply vanished.” She pressed her lips together briefly before adding, “Those men were fiercely loyal to Gorman. If they despised me, they would have come for me—unless Gorman himself ordered them to stay away.”

The room fell deathly silent, the only sound the low hum of the air conditioning.

From the instant Linsey posed her first question, her eyes held firm, her voice steady and measured. She fixed her gaze on Alissa, radiating an undeniable sense of pressure. Whether it was Linsey’s commanding presence or the piercing truth of her words, Alissa felt a chill ripple through her, her body trembling involuntarily. Her throat constricted, rendering her speechless.

Linsey’s keen insight was daunting, stirring unease in Alissa, who, despite her wealth of experience navigating tough situations, found herself rattled by this woman not yet thirty.

As he noticed Alissa’s silence, Bart’s brow furrowed, and he sharply declared, “Utter nonsense.”

Linsey’s gaze shifted to Bart, calm and unshaken. He was clearly less yielding than Alissa, but Linsey remained composed, her brief moment of inner doubt giving way to certainty. She was convinced Alissa and Bart were merely putting on an act in front of her.

Lowering her gaze slightly, she spoke with deliberate calm. “You both know whether I’m speaking nonsense.”

After a brief pause, she continued, “When we met overseas, I could see how deeply you cared for Gorman. It’s only natural you would agree to his outlandish plan.”

Chapter 973:

“You couldn’t bring yourselves to deny his request, especially if he was badly wounded and begging.”

Alissa’s eyes welled with tears, her composure faltering as she turned away, her breathing shaky.

Bart’s expression wavered, but he shot back, “That’s enough!”

Rising to his feet, he glared at Linsey. “You’ve got two minutes. If you still refuse to go to the hospital, I’ll have my men take you there by force.”

With that, he threw a cold glance at Collin, whose face showed clear displeasure.

Bart addressed Collin, his voice devoid of warmth. “Collin, you’re staying here for the time being.”

At those words, Collin shot to his feet, his demeanor as cold as a winter storm. He fixed Bart with a piercing stare and declared sharply, “I’ve made it clear—don’t even consider it. I’ll never let you take Linsey away.”

Linsey swiftly moved to Collin’s side, her hand finding his, her fingers curling tightly around his sturdy grip. His firm hold reassured her, anchoring her resolve. In moments like these, she never felt like a liability to Collin. They were partners, united in purpose. They had arrived together, and they would leave together, unharmed.

Still, she wouldn’t allow Collin to recklessly confront the horde of henchmen waiting outside—that would be a dangerous mistake. “Alissa, Bart, surely you realize how absurd this is, don’t you?” Linsey’s tone was resolute, her voice steady and low. “If I were single, perhaps this conversation would be different. But I have my fiancé and our children. Forcing me to carry Gorman’s child is nothing short of an outrageous violation of personal rights.”

Alissa's face flushed with a mix of fury and embarrassment. "You agreed to cooperate with a hospital visit! Gorman... he died saving your life—you owe us for that loss!"

Linsey couldn't be bothered to argue further about compensation with Alissa. She pressed on, her words measured. "You both know Gorman's nature. If I bore his child, he would never let me go. He would use the child to bind me to him forever. And what about the child? Growing up knowing their mother has another family—wouldn't that leave them feeling abandoned and betrayed? As their grandparents, don't you care about the pain that child would endure?"

Linsey hadn't intended to entertain the idea of this hypothetical child. But Bart and Alissa's relentless stubbornness forced her to counter their reasoning with their own flawed logic. She could vaguely discern Gorman's underlying motives. He staged his own death to manipulate her into guilt, with Alissa and Bart's theatrics intensifying the scheme.

Had Alissa and Bart executed their roles flawlessly, Linsey might have fallen for their deception.

Regardless, she could never consent to such an outrageous request. For one, her connection with Gorman was strictly platonic, devoid of any romantic attachment. Moreover, creating a child was not a matter of mere words—it demanded profound responsibility. To Linsey, giving birth and then shirking all duties afterward would disqualify her from the title of mother.

Alissa, gripping her hands tightly, spoke in a sharp tone. "Once the baby arrives, you'll be free of any obligations. We'll secure a perfect stepmother for the child."

Linsey found this proposition absurd and retorted with biting sarcasm, "If you've already lined up a replacement mother, why not have her go through IVF instead?"

With a scornful edge, she continued, "Does the Green family only know how to wield wealth or deception to coerce innocent women into bearing your heirs?"

"You!" Bart's eyes flared, his face twisting with rage. Most might have cowered under Bart's intimidating presence, but Linsey stood her ground, meeting his stare with composure.

Chapter 974:

“If Gorman is still alive, you could try convincing him to abandon his baseless fixation,” Linsey stated firmly, each word deliberate. “He rescued me, and I owe him my gratitude. Beyond demands I cannot meet, I’m willing to repay him in any other way he desires. But as for IVF, no amount of pressure will ever make me agree.”

Linsey’s gaze drifted toward the private room’s entrance as she spoke. “You’ve surrounded us with your people, thinking you could trap Collin and me. But walls can’t silence the truth forever, and when it breaks free, you’ll find yourselves drowning in litigation.”

“So you’re truly set on defying us?” Fury blazed in Alissa’s eyes. Where had her carefully laid plans begun to crumble?

Linsey possessed a razor-sharp mind, yet her tender heart had always been her weakness. Alissa had been certain that a few well-placed guilt tactics would shepherd the girl straight to the operating table. Now her control was slipping through her fingers like sand.

Linsey’s silence stretched between them, her cool detachment more eloquent than any words.

Bart’s laugh held no warmth. “Then we’re finished with pleasantries.” He then summoned his men.

The door burst open as his men flooded the room like a dark tide. Collin swept Linsey behind him in one fluid motion, his body coiled and ready as he tracked each intruder’s movement.

Then, among the sea of hostile faces, one stood out, unmistakably familiar. Danny stepped forward.

“Mr. and Mrs. Green,” the subordinate announced, his words slicing through the chaos, “our boss has reconsidered.”

Relief washed over Linsey like cool water, loosening the knots of tension in her chest. She was glad that Gorman was still alive.

Surprise flickered across Collin’s features before his mask of composure slid back into place.

Of course, Gorman had orchestrated his own elaborate death scene. The realization brought Collin a complex mix of relief and irritation. Had Gorman truly died saving Linsey, the guilt would have haunted her for years.

Still, this calculated deception had left her twisted in anguish for days. Therefore, Collin was determined to make Gorman pay a price.

Collin's mind was already cataloging a dozen ways to exact his price, methods that would leave no physical marks but would certainly make his point clear.

Danny's announcement struck Alissa like a physical blow, her composure fracturing as conflicting emotions warred in her eyes.

From his hospital bed, Gorman had witnessed every moment of this confrontation, heard every word of Linsey's defiance with perfect clarity.

Alissa had been counting on exploiting that connection, using Linsey's tender heart to honor her son's wishes. Instead, Gorman had abandoned the charade first.

Words deserted Alissa entirely, leaving her grappling with the ruins of her strategy. All their careful theatrics, their elaborate deception, were unraveled by Linsey's sharp intuition.

The weight of her humiliation pressed down like a stone. She couldn't bear to meet Linsey's penetrating gaze, turning away as heat flooded her cheeks.

Bart's expression twisted with barely contained fury, as though he longed to march straight to the hospital and throttle Gorman with his bare hands. He had swallowed his pride, degraded himself with this pathetic performance, all because of Gorman's critical condition.

And now, with victory practically in their grasp, the ungrateful fool had not only reversed course but humiliated them publicly, right in front of Linsey and Collin.



Chapter 975:

“He’s a complete waste! Always acting on a whim!” Bart’s face darkened to a dangerous shade. “I wash my hands of him. Let him rot in his own decisions—I’m through!”

Without sparing Linsey or Collin so much as a glance, Bart wheeled around and stormed toward the exit. Within moments, he had vanished entirely, leaving only the lingering trace of his fury.

Alissa stood frozen, torn between walking away and demanding answers. Her eyes narrowed as she shot a glare at Danny. “Just tell me already—why did Gorman change his mind again? What’s he playing at this time?”

Meanwhile, Linsey had managed to calm herself, but the confusion still clung to her like static. She wasn’t sure how to handle the situation unraveling before her.

She turned slightly, catching Collin’s eyes in the process.

A quiet chuckle escaped him. He leaned in and murmured, “Something on your mind?”

Though tempted to spill everything, Linsey glanced around and held back. “I’ll explain when we’re home.”

Questions kept swirling in her mind. Now that Gorman was alive, would the charges against Kylee and Haven shift? Was it illegal to fake one’s death?

She couldn’t shake the feeling that maybe the authorities had known the truth all along—that Gorman had never died.

Collin’s whole demeanor softened. Gone was the cold edge from earlier. He gave her a small nod. “Alright.”

Across from them, Danny picked up on Alissa’s rising frustration. He let out a quiet sigh, barely audible.

He couldn't help but think that Linsey had a knack for bending things in her favor, somehow getting his boss to backtrack time and time again just for her.

Still, his job was to deliver the message exactly as instructed.

Though he had no fondness for Linsey, Danny kept his gaze down and said, "Ms. Brooks, my boss told me to let you know that if you're serious about making amends, you should go see him at the hospital on your own."

He paused for a moment, then added with added weight, "He made it clear—you have to go by yourself."

Elsewhere, Dolores stirred awake. Her eyes fluttered open to find Zenia and Zander perched at her bedside, both watching her like tiny hawks.

She jerked upright, her eyes darting around in alarm, and asked in a puzzled tone, "What happened, sweethearts?"

Dolores extended her hand and softly tapped the heads of the two children.

Zenia's lips curled into a pout as she looked upset. "Dolores, do you have any idea where Mommy and Daddy went? Zander and I tried calling them, but they wouldn't pick up. Even Glenda doesn't seem to know where they are."

Glenda Reed happened to be the housekeeper that Collin had recently brought on board.

That statement caught Dolores off guard, and for a brief moment, unease settled in her chest.

Without delay, she tried to soothe them. "How about you two stay here and play for a while? I'll go find out what's going on."

She swung her legs over the bed, dressed in haste, and stepped out of the room.

Outside the door, several of Collin's men stood in a cluster, clearly on edge.

"Ms. Davidson," they said in unison, addressing her respectfully as soon as they saw her.

Chapter 976:

The man who led the group stepped forward and said urgently, "Ms. Davidson, have you seen Ms. Brooks? We haven't been able to contact either Mr. Riley or Ms. Brooks, and we're starting to get worried."

"I'll check right now," Dolores replied, knitting her brows together while retrieving her phone. There, she noticed a string of messages from Linsey, all sent around three hours earlier.

She called Linsey, but just as they'd mentioned, the line wouldn't connect.

Dolores's lips pressed into a tight line as she tried calling Collin next. That call failed too.

"This is strange. I can't get through to either of them," Dolores murmured, clearly baffled by the situation.

In her mind, it made sense that Linsey and Collin might have gone somewhere together, but she couldn't imagine where they would go without informing her.

Surely, Linsey wouldn't leave the kids waiting at home without saying a word. That simply wasn't like her.

From the corner of the room, Glenda's voice cut through the tension. "After lunch, Mr. Riley asked me to take Zenia and Zander out for a walk. When we returned, the house was empty. Neither Mr. Riley nor Ms. Brooks could be found."

The men stationed there were under Collin's orders to watch over Zenia and Zander that afternoon.

"So you're saying Linsey and Collin left without any protection?" Something about this didn't sit right with Dolores.

Just then, the head of Collin's security team spoke with quiet authority. "I just received word that Gorman's parents arrived in Grester four hours ago."

Dolores's eyes narrowed as the meaning hit her immediately. It hadn't been long since Gorman died protecting Linsey. Knowing that, Gorman's parents probably blamed her for his death.

On top of that, Collin and Gorman had been enemies for years. Was there a connection between Linsey and Collin's disappearance and the Greens showing up?

Dolores pressed him quickly. "Can you find out where Gorman's parents are?"

The leader replied, "It's possible, but it will take some time. They appear to be deliberately concealing their movements."

Dolores's expression grew more troubled as she heard this. Why would the Greens go to such lengths to cover their tracks?

Obviously, they were planning something.

Dolores glanced down at her phone, where Linsey's last message still glowed on the screen. The timestamp showed three hours ago. That meant Linsey and Collin could have been missing for three entire hours already.

Dolores's breath came in shallow bursts as panic began to claw at her chest.

“Ms. Davidson, we’ve already dispatched teams to check every location Mr. Riley and Ms. Brooks frequent, but there’s been no sign of them. We’ll need to widen our search radius now,” the security leader reported just as fresh updates reached him.

Dolores pressed her lip between her teeth, worry etched across her features. “Have you tried reaching Dustin?”

If Collin was executing some kind of plan, Dustin would surely be in the loop. He was Collin’s most trusted confidant. Otherwise, Dustin would be just as frantic with concern by now.

At Dustin’s name, the team leader’s expression shifted uncomfortably. “Ms. Davidson, we can’t get through to Mr. Wade either. His mother has been... monitoring him quite closely these days.”

Chapter 977:

“Does everything have to fall apart at once?” The words escaped Dolores in a frustrated whisper.

After weighing her options, she resolved to seek out Dustin personally. Another pair of hands and his insights could make all the difference in their search.

“Continue the search operations. I’m going to find Dustin and see what he might know.” Dolores’ instructions were swift and decisive.

Turning to Glenda, she said, “Glenda, please look after Zenia and Zander. We’ll station a few guards here for everyone’s protection.”

“Of course, Ms. Davidson,” Glenda replied without hesitation.

Dolores wasted no time. She gathered her belongings and headed out to track down Dustin. Since Collin’s team couldn’t reach him, chances were slim he would be at CR Corporation.

Dolores knew where Dustin lived. As she drove through the city streets, she tried his number. She braced herself for another unanswered call, just like her failed attempts to reach Linsey and Collin.

To her surprise, the phone barely rang twice before someone picked up. Dolores paused, confused. Why had Collin's men claimed they couldn't get through to Dustin?

She was about to speak when a soft, feminine voice drifted through the line.

"Hello. Who is this?"

Dolores went rigid, her face hardening in an instant. A flurry of possibilities raced through her mind within seconds. Why was a woman answering Dustin's phone? Even if it was his assistant or secretary, they wouldn't likely have the audacity to pick up his personal phone without clear permission, would they?

It also couldn't be a housekeeper or anyone else in his employ. Dolores pieced her thoughts together slowly. Whoever answered Dustin's phone with such ease had to share a significant connection with him.

Dolores forced her pounding heart to settle, swallowing hard before speaking in a tight voice. "This is Dolores Davidson. I need to speak with Dustin. Is he available?"

She shut her eyes briefly, willing herself to stay calm. Now wasn't the time to spiral into suspicion. Finding Linsey and Collin was the priority.

"Oh, Ms. Davidson. I've heard of you. They say you and Dustin have a great relationship and are well-matched business partners," the woman on the other end replied, her voice light with a soft chuckle.

Dolores' brow furrowed, her lips pressing into a thin line as an uneasy feeling settled over her.

"Is Dustin busy? I have urgent matters to discuss with him," Dolores said.

The woman paused as if just realizing something, then responded in an apologetic tone. "I'm so sorry, Dustin's in the shower right now. If it's alright, I can take a message and let him know."

Dolores' breath caught for a split second. She steadied herself, adopting a professional tone. "If you could ask him to hurry, I would appreciate it. Aurora, our designer, is planning a collaboration with CR Corporation, and I need to go over some critical details with him on her behalf."

Was she talking about Linsey, the rising star from the recent Grester fashion design competition? Joanne had only recently found out that Aurora was Linsey.

Her eyes flickered briefly before she responded smoothly, "Alright. Please hold on for a moment."

She muted the call and climbed the stairs to Dustin's bedroom, pushing the door open without hesitation. The bathroom light glowed, and the faint sound of running water drifted through the air.

Chapter 978:

Joanne's expression remained unchanged as she approached and rapped on the bathroom door.

"Who's there?" The water's flow softened, and Dustin's voice came through, slightly muffled.

Joanne replied evenly, "Dolores Davidson is on the phone for you. She mentioned..."

Before she could finish, the water cut off entirely, followed by a rustle from inside. The bathroom door flew open. Dustin, already dressed, fixed his gaze on the phone in Joanne's hand.

"Who said you could touch my phone?" he demanded, his voice sharp with anger as he snatched it from her without waiting for a response. Joanne flinched, her wrist stinging, and looked up to see Dustin glaring at the phone, his face taut with tension.

Joanne widened her eyes in disbelief. She let out a soft scoff. "You left your phone downstairs after your swim. It was ringing, so I brought it up. And this is how you thank me? That's awfully harsh."

Dustin's irritation flared every time Joanne spoke. "Get out," he snapped.

Those who knew Dustin understood how rare it was for him to lose his cool. He usually carried himself with a laid-back, almost playful air. Around women, he was effortlessly charming, disarming them with a quick wit and a few well-chosen words. This was the first time he had ever shown such raw anger toward a woman.

Joanne was clearly offended, but since the call involved Linsey, she forced herself to stay calm.

"Be careful. Mrs. Wade might show up any second, and you won't have time to react," Joanne warned before walking out. She slammed the door behind her, the loud bang echoing through the hallway.

As she walked away, her irritation grew. Dustin's attitude replayed in her head like an annoying tune she couldn't shake off. Kase had claimed Dustin was easygoing and pleasant. Clearly, Kase had it all wrong.

What was so special about this hot-headed, spoiled man that made him worth trying to impress?

Joanne bit her lip, anger simmering inside her. Jeffery, who was gentle and calm, was way out of Dustin's league. Her gaze dropped as she remembered what Dolores had said about Linsey over the phone. Linsey looked so much like Jeffery. Maybe it was just a gut feeling, but Joanne strongly believed there was a blood connection between the two.

Otherwise, how could two strangers look so much alike?

She had hoped to use Linsey to get closer to Jeffery. But Linsey had already seen her at the Walton family's estate. That plan was now useless.

Linsey seemed to believe she was close to Haven. That meant she would be on guard around her.

Joanne sighed softly, the sting of being driven out by Dustin already fading from her mind.



Just then, the door behind her swung open again. She turned to see Dustin throwing on his coat, his expression tense and focused. His eyes showed urgency—something was clearly wrong. Dolores had just called him, so why did he still look so troubled?

This was different from the usual anger he carried around.

Joanne sensed something wasn't right. She quickly stepped in front of him. "Where are you going?"

Dustin had just learned that Linsey and Collin were missing. He didn't have time for anything else. Throwing on his jacket, he headed straight out. He also knew that Gorman's parents had arrived in Grester.

He hadn't considered the Greens a threat. But with Linsey and Collin out of touch for over three hours—and without any security—it was impossible not to worry.

Chapter 979:

Dustin was already on edge, and his face darkened even further when Joanne blocked his way.

"Joanne, seriously?" he snapped, clenching his jaw. "Don't think my mother's support gives you the right to control me!" He made a move to shove her aside.

Joanne didn't flinch. Her voice turned sharp. "Didn't Dolores say you were meeting Linsey to talk business? Why do you look so serious? Did something happen to her?"

Dustin's frown deepened. He didn't have time to wonder how Joanne knew Linsey. "This doesn't concern you. Move."

But Joanne was even more certain now—something had gone wrong.

She stood her ground. "You know I'm here because your mother asked me to keep an eye on you. Don't you get it? If you push me away, she'll only tighten her hold. You think you can slip out that easily? Why

not take me with you? We'll pretend we're going on a date. It'll be easier to sneak out that way. Or do you think you'll get past the guards alone?"

Joanne spoke so quickly that Dustin barely had time to respond. He had started off impatient, but by the end, her logic caught him off guard. Surprisingly, her words made sense.

Hester had arranged for a suitable rich girl to keep him away from Dolores. And right now, finding Collin and Linsey was far more important than anything else.

"Alright, enough talk. Let's go," Dustin said.

Bringing Joanne along wasn't a big deal. His only concern was that she might run to Hester and say he went to see Dolores again. But this time, he was going out to find a missing friend. Even Hester wouldn't try to stop that.

Just as Joanne had warned, the guards stopped them the moment they stepped outside the villa.

"Mr. Wade, your mother asked that you stay indoors for a few days," one of them said.

The sight of the guards made Dustin's blood boil. But before he could snap, Joanne stepped in with a sweet smile.

"Mr. Wade is taking me out shopping. I'll explain to Mrs. Wade later. She wants me and Dustin to get closer, right?"

The guards exchanged glances. Hester had indeed said to give them some alone time. Since Joanne had spoken, they had no choice but to let them go.

"Understood, Ms. Ellis."

They stepped aside and cleared the way.

Dustin's lips twitched. Sometimes it felt like Joanne was more like Hester's child than he was. Hester had been watching him like a hawk lately.

At last, he stepped out of the luxurious villa, which felt more like a golden cage.

Soon, Dustin and Joanne spotted Dolores' car parked in an open area two kilometers away.

Dustin hadn't seen Dolores in days. His heart leapt with excitement.

"Dolores!" he called out, rushing toward her with open arms.

But the moment Dolores spotted Joanne behind him, she stepped aside with a cold look.

She hadn't expected him to bring another woman.

That had to be the same woman who picked up the phone earlier. Dustin, caught off guard by her dodge, nearly crashed into the car.

"Dolores, I—"

But she cut him off, opening the driver's door. Her voice was flat. "Just get in."

Chapter 980:

Joanne watched the entire scene with interest. Seeing Dustin's awkwardness brought a smile to her face.

Dustin swallowed the rest of his words. Now wasn't the time to explain anything.

He quickly moved to open the front passenger door.

But it didn't budge.

"That seat's for the lady," Dolores said coolly, already settling into the driver's seat.

Joanne raised an eyebrow, walked past Dustin, opened the door with ease, and sat down. "Hurry up, Dustin," she said casually.

Still standing outside, Dustin stared at her smug smile.

He blinked in disbelief, then caught a glimpse of Dolores' colder expression through the mirror.

He bit back his frustration and quietly opened the rear door.

Once he was inside, Dolores started the engine. "Have you reached Collin?" she asked.

"No. I tried calling on the way here, but the call didn't go through. Collin's tracker signal didn't show up either," Dustin said seriously. Dolores had already explained the situation briefly over the phone. But in all the time Dustin had known Collin, the latter had never gone this long without contact.

What made it worse—none of Collin's closest aides knew his whereabouts.

"Tracker?" Dolores asked, her eyes still focused on the road.

"Yes. Collin's phone has had one for a while. Only a few trusted people can access it. Linsey has one too. But even with both trackers, the men came back with nothing," Dustin explained.

As the founder of CR Corporation, Collin had plenty of enemies. They always had to stay alert. But now, not even a clue was left behind. They had no idea where Collin and Linsey were—or if they were even safe.

While Dustin and Dolores spoke, Joanne stayed quiet and listened. So Linsey and Collin were both missing? Strange. Collin was a powerful man. How could someone like him just vanish?

“Ms. Davidson, do you have any suspects?” Joanne suddenly asked.

Dolores glanced at her, a flicker of emotion in her eyes. “You...”

Sensing her pause, Joanne smiled lightly. “I’m Joanne Ellis. Mrs. Wade introduced me to Dustin.”

Dustin looked startled, then quickly explained, “Dolores, it’s not what you think. I—”

Dolores didn’t look at him. She kept her focus ahead and said sharply, “I don’t care what’s going on between you two. But since you’re here, don’t make things harder. We’re searching for people who matter to us.”

“I understand. You’re looking for Linsey and Collin. I already knew—I’m a friend of Haven’s,” Joanne replied calmly.

Dolores’ brows immediately furrowed, and Dustin’s eyes darkened.

“What did you say? You’re friends with Haven?” he snapped. He and Dolores both knew about Haven’s secret plan to use Kylee against Linsey. It was shocking to hear Joanne admit being close to her.

Then Dustin added with a frown, “So the Walton family you recently joined... That’s Haven’s family?”

He had only heard rumors—Joanne wasn’t born into privilege, but had recently been accepted into the Walton name. However, he hadn’t connected the dots until now. His mind had been too preoccupied with Dolores.